25¢

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Ten Good Stories

BEGINNING

"THE SECRET OF THE GODS"

By

KATHARINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"THE MAN WHO ESCAPED"

By

Tod Robbins

Author of "The Unholy Three"

DO YOU KNOW

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

is the magazine in which

"Beau Sabreur"

By PERCIVAL C. WREN
Author of "Beau Geste"

first appeared under the title of "Who Rideth Alone?" This novel, the mystery-adventure hit of the hour, published by The Frederick A. Stokes Company, is to be filmed by Famous Players-Lasky.

"Still Within the Law"

By BAYARD VEILLER
author of "Within the Law," "The Thirteenth Chair," etc.

was another MYSTERY MAGAZINE serial. It will be screened by Universal.

"Sinister House"

By CHARLES G. BOOTH

on the Fall List of books published by William Morrow and Company also first saw the light in the pages of MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

A partial list of authors whose stories have appeared in MYSTERY MAGAZINE includes such names as Richard Le Gallienne, Dale Collins, Susan Ertz, Agatha Christie, E. Philips Oppenheim, Tod Robbins, Katharine Haviland Taylor, Charles Wesley Sanders, Elizabeth Herrick, Robert W. Sneddon, Charlton L. Edholm, Everett Shinn, Ralph Mooney, Edgar Wallace, F. Tennyson Jesse, Leslie Gordon Barnard, Ben Lucien Burman, William Merriam Roúse, S. Carleton, Lemuel de Bra, Wolcott Le Clear Beard, Grace Lovell Bryan, Thoda Cocroft, Josephine Bentham and Henry Leverage.

Past performances are forerunners of the future!

READ

At Your Newsdealers MYSTERY MAGAZINE *Price 25c*

ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume X Number 1

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Subscription Price: In United States and Possessions $3.00 per year; single copy 25 cents. Canada $3.50 per year; foreign $4.00.

Published monthly by The Priscilla Company, publication office 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York City. Entered as second-class matter December 24, 1925, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Trade Mark Registered.

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Around the Corner

PERHAPS it is not generally appreciated that mystery is fundamentally responsible for most of the progress Man has made upon the earth. This two-legged thinking animal who now strolls from Singapore to Saguenay as nonchalantly as though he were just going in to dinner, did not always stroll quite so nonchalantly. The way was not so clear as it is today. There was mystery on the high road, and there was still more mystery where there was no road at all. Continents lived behind drawn shades, and visitors were not always welcome.

But Man is an inquisitive creature. He will investigate anything —from a burglar-proof safe to a raindrop. And he has gone to a great deal of trouble to reach the North and South Poles for the same reason that led Columbus into the accidental "discovery" of America: simply because there were unsolved mysteries behind a veil.

IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

of MYSTERY MAGAZINE a complete novelette called *Jewels,* by Elizabeth Herrick, will engage your earnest attention from the first sentence to the last. It is that kind of story—and you will heartily approve of the climax.

This will also be true of *Lady Luck,* another complete novelette, by Wolcott Le Clear Beard. And if you don't believe in luck or fate or anything of that sort, read *Lady Luck* anyway, and have a fine time jeering at it. The chances are you'll come to jeer and remain to cheer.

A Fool Like Him, by William Merriam Rouse.
The Ghost's Keeper, by Hudson Strode.
Sand, by Victor Lauriston.
A Tough Crowd, by Ralph Durand.

All of these and more in the November issue. Really good stories well told.

The Man Who Escaped

By TOD ROBBINS

Author of "The Unholy Three," Etc.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

TOD ROBBINS, whose inventive genius conceived such a master-piece of mystery and adventure as "The Unholy Three," has here a new story filled with those ingredients so necessary to the type of stories we like to provide for your entertainment. Here is a tale with a theme that rings true and characters that live before your eyes.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLAVERINGS

THE CLAVERINGS have been a famous family ever since they emigrated to America in the Sixteenth Century. A member of that ancient and honorable house distinguished himself in the French and Indian War; another froze with Washington at Valley Forge and later crossed the ice-crowned Delaware to offer the compliments of the season to the amazed Hessians. A third, a fire-eating colonel under Sherman, was reported to have a charmed life till he fell with a bullet through his brain at the gates of Atlanta; and a fourth, Captain George Clavering, Walter's father, met his death bravely at Colonel Roosevelt's bridle-rein during the battle of San Juan. All and all, it was a family which had written its name boldly with its own hot blood on the virgin pages of our national history.

The Claverings had all been Yale men for generations. The family was like one of the institutions of old Eli. Troy had had her Hector; the Greeks, their Achilles and Ulysses; but we had our Claverings.

Ever since football had first loomed out of the dark ages which preceded intercollegiate sports, a Clavering would flash across Harvard's or Princeton's goal line at the most opportune moment.

This one had kicked a winning field-goal from the fifty-yard line; that one had run through the entire Harvard team for a touchdown; a third had led his men to victory with half his ribs kicked in. And so it had gone for generations of college students, till it had gotten to be a foregone conclusion that, if a Clavering were at New Haven, Yale must win. All this brings me up to my meeting with the last of the line.

I WAS going up to New Haven for my freshman year. There were a large number of Yale men on the train. I pretended to be deeply engrossed in a novel while, in reality, my ears were pricked to catch any scattered fragments of conversation which might drift my way. Before

long my vigilance was rewarded by two upper-class men who occupied the seat in front of me.

"This should be a big year for Yale in football," one of them said.

"Why?" the other asked. "There are not many of the Varsity men left."

"No matter. There's a Clavering coming to New Haven this year. You know what that has always meant."

"What! One of the famous Claverings? Why, I didn't think there was one of the clan left."

"Yes, there is. This is the son of 'Bull' Clavering who won the Princeton game in 1896."

"Funny I never heard of him! Where did he prep?"

"After 'Bull' was killed in the Spanish-American War, his widow went abroad to live. I understand that young Clavering was brought up in England."

"What a damn shame! He'll have to learn football from the ground up."

"Not on your life! It will be second nature to him. That crowd are born football players."

SO A CLAVERING was matriculating at Yale in my class. It gave me a feeling of exultation to know that I would soon have a member of that illustrious family as a classmate and perhaps as an intimate friend. Some day we might even play on the Varsity team together, if I were fortunate enough to make it.

But at this moment a shrill voice broke into my reverie and I felt a heavy suitcase pushed against my legs. Glancing up in some annoyance, I saw the owner of the shrill voice and bulky luggage about to seat himself.

He was a very short, fat and flabby young man. Beads of perspiration dimmed his huge spectacles and glistened on his bulbous cheeks. He had a little uptilted nose, as red as a radish, which twitched like a rabbit's from time to time; a double-chin which quivered like rolls of jelly; and an ample paunch which rose and fell to stertorous breathing. Physically, he was a born comedian, yet the fellow carried his double-chin high in the air like one who had a good opinion of himself.

"This seat isn't engaged, I hope?" he asked, leaning back and crossing his plump legs with the air of a man who is taking possession willy-nilly. "I don't want to turn anyone out."

I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell him that it was, for I didn't fancy the chap as a traveling companion. I wished to make a good impression upon the two upper-class men in front of me and didn't want to become affiliated in their minds with this ridiculous, flabby fellow.

"No," I answered at length.

"Are you in this year's freshman class at Yale?" he asked, and this time his voice seemed to be tinged with the slightest shade of patronage.

I nodded brusquely and turned to the window.

"Well, we'll be classmates. I'm entering Yale this fall. But it feels just like going home. Almost all of my family have gone to Yale."

"Indeed," I said coldly with my eyes on a herd of cows grazing in a field beside the tracks.

"Yes," he continued, apparently quite unconscious of my frigidity. "We have all been here for a while. But it doesn't seem to be the tophole old place it used to be. It's a bally shame the way Harvard's been showing us up in football the last few seasons."

I shuddered, although it was stiflingly hot in the train. It did not take the amused smiles on the faces of the collegians in my immediate vicinity to apprise me of the enormity my traveling companion had just

been guilty of. He had spoken, with what I considered an affected English accent, disparagingly of Yale's athletes when he was not even yet enrolled in the university and referred to them slightingly as us.

"Perhaps, after you've entered college, football will improve," I said ironically.

To my amazement, he took me quite seriously. One of his plump, white hands fluttered up to a fuzzy, straggling mustache which lay across his lip like a caterpillar. He raised his double-chin still more and puffed out his cheeks to alarming proportions.

"It's bound to," he wheezed. "They need a chap to put heart in them."

By this time my irritation had turned to amusement, an amusement which I could see was shared by everyone in hearing distance. Overmastering a wild desire to burst out into a roar of laughter, I turned two watery eyes on my flabby, bespectacled companion and asked him if he played football.

"Never," he answered, staring at me owlishly. "But I'm taking it up this year. They need good football players at Yale."

There came a subdued chuckle from the seat in front of us and I heard one of the upper-class men say: "He's right, Slats; we need football players. Of course, we might find some good men on the bean-bags' team; but if we took them off to play football, Vassar might beat us in bean-bags."

My traveling companion overheard these remarks. "What is bean-bags?" he asked seriously. "How do you play it?"

"First you find someone who has a bean, they're very rare, and then you bean them."

"Bean them? I don't understand. And where do the bags come in?"

"Why, that's what you bean them with," I answered with my eyes on the ears of the upper-class men which were a crimson tribute to my humor. "It's quite a brutal sport, old dear."

"I suppose the bags are filled with sand or something," he muttered. "Yes, I imagine it would be rather rough. Funny I never heard of it in England." He broke off and regarded me owlishly. "I don't know much about American colleges," he continued. "You see, I've lived abroad ever since I was a little chap. Now what I need is someone to put me onto the ropes. What do you say, old man, if we dig in together somewhere? You can be devilish useful to me."

"Much obliged," I muttered, positively amazed by the fellow's effrontery. "To whom do I owe thanks for this uncalled-for hospitality?"

He raised his quivering chin still higher and surveyed me for an instant from the dark shadows cast by his spectacles. His whole plump, pompous person seemed to emit warm, reassuring rays of patronage.

"My name is Clavering," he said very slowly, "Walter Clavering."

CHAPTER II.

THE DUMBNESS OF YALE

THE upshot of our chance meeting on the train was my friendship for Walter Clavering which lasted uninterruptedly up to the time of his tragic death. And, strange as it may seem, the man's idiosyncrasies, his ridiculous personal appearance, his blatant egotism and the apparent selfishness which sprang from it; all, as time went by, endeared him to me the more.

He boasted, not as other men boast to conceal a weakness, but as though each one of his wild statements were an unalterable truth.

I will never forget the intense sol-

emnity mirrored on his face when he spoke about himself. There was nothing of the boaster about him at such times, for with the boaster there is always a vague timidity which springs either from fear of ridicule or else through dread of being detected in a lie.

No, he did it quite unconsciously with the clear, calm eyes of a child. He spoke of himself as though he were a public institution which was neglected; an institution which, if properly used, would prove invaluable to the common good.

YALE, at first, was bitterly disappointed with the last of the Claverings. The college had expected the scion of that illustrious house to be a young man of brawn and sinew. They had been prepared to welcome a hero into their midst, they were aghast to behold a buffoon.

A Clavering with a paunch which shook absurdedly up and down when he ran, short, flabby legs and weak pop-eyes like a frog—it was a staggering blow for old Eli!

But gradually the student body began to appreciate him in a quite different fashion than they had imagined. He looked like a clown and so they dubbed him one.

His strange owlish solemnity when one of his frequent moods of loquacity seized him, moods when he boasted by the hour of what he could do if the football coach only gave him a chance, convulsed whole rooms full of collegians.

They considered him a howling success crowned with cap and bells. The last of the Claverings, like the last of most fashions, philosophies, religions, had become a joke.

I soon learned that Walter's upbringing was the direct cause of his absurd egotism. Mrs. Clavering, after her husband's death, had shut herself in from the world and seen to it that her only son had done the same. She was an extremely romantic woman and a great sentimentalist.

These qualities, having no natural outlet in the society of others, had all become focussed on the memory of the gallant captain and everything that pertained to him.

She saw in her fat, nearsighted son another hero in that race of heroes; and she had brought him up to believe implicitly that he had been born to play a leading role on the stage of life.

NATURALLY Walter went out for the football team. He had been told from infancy that all Claverings played football of necessity a great deal better than anyone else.

I shall never forget the odd appearance he made on the first day, in a brand-new uniform several sizes too small for him and still wearing his huge spectacles which glowed in the sun like the headlights of a motor-car. He made the coach wince.

"What's your name?" Fitzroy asked gruffly.

"Clavering, sir. Walter Clavering."

The coach started involuntarily. "Not one of the old Clavering family of Yale, surely?"

"Yes, sir," Walter answered proudly, puffing out his cheeks. "My father was called 'Bull' Clavering. He was captain here in 1896."

"'Bull' Clavering's son!" Fitzroy muttered. His keen gray eyes once more ran up and down the ridiculous, flabby figure before him, and he savagely chewed the bristling ends of his mustache. "Well, let's see you fall on the ball, Clavering," he finished.

"But I'm afraid I might break it," Walter replied. "It's only an inflated rubber bag with a covering of leather, and I'm rather heavy, sir."

There came a shout of laughter from all within hearing distance.

Clavering had laid the cornerstone of his reputation. From then on, everything he did or said was greeted with unsuppressed merriment.

WALTER was a hopeless football player from the first. He was flat-footed, ungainly and slow thinking—added to which, he had one of those unfortunate bodies which do not seem to improve no matter what course of physical training is pursued. Fat and flabby he was on entering Yale, and fat and flabby he remained after four long seasons of the most strenuous kind of work on the gridiron.

But he had two spiritual qualities without which one can never become a leading luminary: stick-to-it-iveness and courage. These two essentials were his to a marked degree.

Each fall he could be seen waddling out on the gridiron, the football joke of college, to offer his pudgy body with the other scrubs to the Varsity battering-ram.

Sometimes he would show me his mental bruises, which were far worse than the discolorations which stood out on his soft white skin. I believe I was the only one in whom he confided.

"Won't they ever give me a chance in a game?" he would cry excitedly. "What good do I do Yale on the sidelines? We would have beaten Princeton if I'd been in the other day! You Varsity men were a bunch of dummies to let them smear you that way!"

Then I would usually lose my temper. While he attacked the coach and the Varsity team, I would attack him. I would tell him that he was fortunate to be allowed to play on the scrubs.

"They think it's lucky to have you sitting on the sidelines during a game," I told him brutally on one occasion. "That's the only reason they let you stay on the squad. You've beaten out the bulldog for the job of mascot. This year the Navy have their goat; the Army their mule; but we have a Clavering."

"Can't you see what the college is losing?" he cried. "Man, I tell you I'd win for them!"

"Don't be such a fathead!" I replied sharply. "What makes you think you're such a star? Why, you're none too good on the scrubs! Today we made two touchdowns through you."

"But can't you see that that's different?" he almost shouted. "I was never intended to play on the scrubs! I was built for the Varsity!"

So he was built for the Varsity! I ran my eyes over him speculatively. There he sat proudly, his double-chin lifted and trembling, his paunch protruding valiantly above his tight leather belt, his little red radish of a nose twitching like a rabbit's. Built for the Varsity, indeed! The poor misguided fellow!

AND YET it was just three weeks later when the whole college sang his praises, when his name was inscribed beside his illustrious ancestors' in the Eli Hall of Fame. It came about like this:

It was the last game of the season in our senior year. We had lost to Princeton and the betting overwhelmingly favored Harvard.

As usual Walter Clavering, wrapped up in sweaters, sat on the sidelines with the scrubs while we ran through signal practice and lined up to receive the kickoff. So he had sat countless times before, he and the bulldog, our two mascots together.

But this was the last game of his last year at New Haven! It must have been especially hard for him to sit there that afternoon like a dummy in the show-window of some sporting goods store.

That game was a battle from the

whistle. We had bucked up surprisingly since the Princeton defeat and gave them as good as they sent. It was a kicking duel from start to finish, with Harvard gaining a few yards at each exchange of punts. In the last quarter Barclay, their captain, kicked a field-goal from our forty-yard line.

It looked black as midnight for Yale till a few plays later when Sherwood got away and wasn't downed till he was on Harvard's five-yard line. Well, I was called back for a plunge through right-tackle; and what did I do but fumble the pass. It was Harvard's ball on her own ten-yard line. Of course they decided to punt out of danger. But it was at this point that Walter Clavering stepped into the game.

The coach told me afterward that he ran over to him, crying and wringing his pudgy hands. A most ridiculous figure he must have cut, but for once no one laughed.

"For God's sake, let me in!" he bellowed. "I'm a Clavering, and I want to go in!"

Now, Fitzroy is a superstitious man or he would never have kept Walter on the sidelines as long as he did. He had a weakness for four-leaf clovers and dreams and omens.

He looked into Walter's tear-dimmed eyes, and all at once he got a hunch. Nothing could do any harm now. There wasn't a half-minute left to play and Harvard seemed to have the game in her pocket. So he gave Clavering a tingling slap on the back.

"Go in and play like hell!" he shouted.

A moment later Walter crouched beside me in the line, breathing hard through his little red nose and his cheeks all shiny with tears. Harvard was about to kick. Their signals came to us with a heart-rending distinctness:

"9—14—7—6!"

And then something truly miraculous happened. I was buried under a Harvard tackle and guard and saw nothing distinctly, but the coach told me afterward.

"By God!" he cried, "Clavering broke through their line like it was made of paper! And up in the air he jumped, like a flying porpoise! Barclay kicked for Harvard; and, by the hopping elephants of Timbuktu, if the ball didn't hit Walter square on the chest and go for a trip back of their own goal line! And then——"

But we all knew what happened then. Beyond the shadow of the goal-posts we found Walter sprawling awkwardly on his back with the precious pigskin clutched tight to his paunch. But there was no elation in his solemn, owlish eyes when we pulled him to his feet. He never even smiled.

"What are you so gloomy about?" I asked him later. "You look as though you had lost your last friend instead of just winning the Harvard game. Why, this should be the happiest day of your life!"

"I was just thinking of all Yale's defeats in the last three years," he answered soberly. "They needn't have been."

"They needn't have been?"

"No!" he burst out savagely. "Why didn't those fool coaches put me on the Varsity at the very first?"

CHAPTER III

CHIMERAS

CLAVERING and I graduated in the class of 1913. His mother had died the previous winter, leaving him a considerable fortune; and so, on quitting New Haven, he rented an expensive apartment on Riverside Drive and fitted it up sumptuously. He wanted

me to go in with him; but, as my income was not yet elastic enough to share his expenses, I declined.

That first year out of college we saw a great deal of each other. We both met Dorothy Pendleton at a New Year's dance, and we both simultaneously fell head over heels in love with her.

Poor Walter! From the first, he was doomed to disappointment. As a Romeo, he cut an even more ridiculous figure than he had as a football player.

I remember that he dogged her footsteps for months like a dispirited Falstaff, his solemn eyes peering shyly at her from behind enormous spectacles, his diminutive nose twitching pathetically.

At first Dorothy rather enjoyed the situation. He supplied a dash of comedy to the drab formalities of everyday life. No doubt she would have endured his admiration for months, had he assumed the humble role so in keeping with his surplus avoirdupois. But Walter was quite incapable of playing the humble pig looking out through the bars of its pen at unattainable beauty.

No, he could not beg for favors. He attempted to woo her as an all-conquering hero. He spoke of what he could do in the world if he had a chance, of his illustrious family, of what it meant to be a Clavering. In fact, he boasted very much as he had in college, and he was laughed at and sent about his business.

"Why, he's a perfect idiot!" Dorothy told me months later. "You can have no idea how he acted the last time I saw him. You'd think he were offering me a throne, at the very least! There he stood on his fat bow-legs, his eyes fairly popping out of his head, looking for all the world like a big bullfrog. There he stood, Dick, telling me that I was worthy to be his wife and that, if I said the word, I could be a Clavering! He spoke as though he were Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Napoleon was fat," I suggested.

"Don't be a fool, Dick!" she cried angrily. "He didn't have pop-eyes and a nose like a radish!"

POOR WALTER took Dorothy's dismissal of him to heart. He no longer went out to dances, but sulked the evenings away in solitary grandeur.

It is said on good authority that an unhappy love affair is conducive to thinness; with Walter it seemed to have directly the opposite effect. During that winter and spring he swelled out to truly mammoth proportions.

It was about this time that I first encountered the East Indian doctor in his apartment. To this day, I don't know where Walter picked him up. From the first I took a violent dislike to the man.

He was as small and wizened as a monkey, with a skin the color of a sun-dried mushroom. Were it not for his eyes, which were large, dark and extraordinarily brilliant, he would have looked perfectly at home in one of the mummy cases at the Metropolitan Museum.

This odd and repellent brown man soon became Clavering's constant companion. There he would sit in Walter's apartment, a white turban surmounting his head, silent, immovable, his great flashing eyes staring any other visitor out of countenance.

Although he spoke English fluently and with scarcely any foreign accent, it was as much as I could do to drag a word out of him. There was something disconcerting about the fellow's taciturnity which gradually wore on my nerves and made my visits to Riverside Drive less frequent. I soon saw little or nothing of Clavering.

The East Indian, of course, was not altogether to blame for this. My love affair with Dorothy and the European War left me little time for what I deemed less important matters. The former soon guided me into the more or less peaceful waters of engagement, the latter finally carried me overseas.

My family was Belgian on my mother's side. I was young, strong and romantic. I deemed it my duty to join the Allied Armies. At first Dorothy remonstrated, but finally I won her over to my way of thinking. On the day when I gained her consent to my soldiering, we announced our engagement.

A WEEK before I sailed, I paid Clavering a farewell visit. For once the East Indian was nowhere about the premises. I found Walter lying full-length on one of his divans, robed in a flowered dressing-gown which gave his bulky figure the look of some gross Chinese mandarin. He had been dozing, as was not an uncommon custom of his in the afternoon; but he roused himself at my appearance.

"I've come to say good-by, Walter," I said, advancing and offering him my hand. "I'm sailing for France on Monday."

"What are you going to do there?" he asked, eyeing me suspiciously. "Are you taking Dorothy with you?"

A natural delicacy had prompted me to silence concerning my engagement. I was therefore slightly surprised that he, himself, should refer to it.

"No, of course not," I answered after a pause. "The Belgian Army's no place for a girl. I'm enlisting, Walter."

Clavering sat bolt upright and began to tug at his absurd caterpillar mustache. A spark of animation crept into his eyes.

"Enlist, eh?" he muttered. "Well, that's right, that's right. I'll be doing the same when America goes into the War. We Claverings, you know, have all been soldiers."

I looked at his uncouth body, at his watery eyes which could not be imagined as taking aim along a gun-barrel, at his pink, pudgy hands as soft and useless as a baby's, and it was all I could do to restrain a smile. Walter was once more the unconscious humorist in whom the student body at Yale had exulted.

"My time hasn't come yet," he continued pompously. "We Claverings have fought under no other flag than the Stars and Stripes since the Revolution. But soon America must go in, and then——"

He paused and made a vague prophetic gesture. That gesture had in it the sublime conceit of a Nero striking his lyre in time to the falling towers of Rome. It seemed to signify that this war had been created for his especial benefit, so that he, a Clavering, might show the gaping world a thing or two.

Hot anger followed my amusement at the man. That superb gesture of an impotent hand had overstepped the boundaries of my humor and my pity and my tolerance. I felt that the bladder of his vanity must be pricked instantly or he might burst foully before me. Purposely I lashed him with a few direct, cruel words.

"Dorothy and I will not marry till I return," I said slowly. "I thought that you might act as my best man."

He was silent for a moment, and I saw his face twitch spasmodically. His eyes stared solemnly into mine.

"I don't think you'll ever marry her," he said at last very distinctly. "I believe—in fact, I know—that she belongs to me."

"What?"

"Yes." He had risen heavily and

now laid his hand patronizingly on my shoulder. "I hate to take anything you prize away from you, old chap; but in this case I really must. All along I've known that she belonged to me. It wouldn't be fair to Dorothy if I let you marry her."

"If you let me marry her!" I cried, shaken by a strange intermingling of anger and mirth. "May I ask where you come in?"

"Why, I'm her man," Clavering said simply. "She was made for me and I was made for her. You don't know it yet, Dick—it isn't really your fault—but you don't belong."

"You're mad! I believe associating with that East Indian quack has driven you dotty."

"On the contrary, I've never been saner in my life," he replied calmly. "And that East Indian quack, as you call him, is the only one who has actually seen me as I am."

"You mean he's filled you up with flattery and lies."

"No, he has seen me as I really am. And some day Dorothy will also see me as I am. I'll take no unfair advantages, Dick—no Clavering does that—and I'll wait till you come back before I win her from you."

"Thanks," I muttered with a grin.

"THERE ARE MANY truths buried in India," Clavering resumed, as though I had not spoken. "They have discovered the secret of a chimera.

A man is on a desert. Suddenly he sees a city rise before him—battlements and towers and trees which wave their branches above its walls. He runs forward and it vanishes.

He hasn't seen a city, but the soul of a city. Perhaps a hundred miles away is the real city from which the soul has stolen out. Yet the real city is not so bright in the sunshine and its streets are muddied by the plodding feet of fact. A chimera is a reality washed clean of life. It may be the soul of a city or the soul of a man."

"If you'll pardon me," I broke in, "I think you're talking the worst foolishness I ever listened to. At one moment, you say you'll take Dorothy away from me; at the next, you rave about chimeras. What has a chimera got to do with Dorothy, you and me?"

"I assure you that an analogy exists," he answered, smiling at me with irritating benignity. "I can say no more until the doctor and I have looked further into the matter. But you can rest assured that I'll not take Dorothy away from you while you're in the war. I give you the word of a Clavering that I won't even attempt to see her."

"Who cares whether you see her or not!" I cried in exasperation. "She's as safe with you as she would be with one of the dolls my little sister plays with."

"Perhaps now," he murmured, once more proudly twirling the straggling ends of his mustache. "Perhaps now—but not when she sees me as I really am."

"Mad!" I cried, turning to the door. "As mad as a March hare!"

On the threshold, I turned and looked at him. There he stood, paunchy and pitiful, still attempting pathetically to give his drooping mustache a military twirl.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW OF A CLAVERING

I SERVED over two years with the Belgian Army before I was incapacitated for further active service by a whiff of mustard gas. Returning to New York shortly after the United States declared war on Germany, I attempted to readjust myself to a civilian life.

Dorothy and I planned to be mar-

ried as soon as possible. Attempting to round up a few of my old college friends, I found that most of them were already in the army or else at officers' training camps. Clavering was the only one I could lay my hands on.

I found him pacing up and down his apartment in a frenzy of irritability. It seemed that he had been moving heaven and earth to get into the army and had been turned down by a dozen different branches of the service. One could not blame the medical examiners for rejecting him. The last two years had left him flatter and flabbier than ever.

"What do you think, Dick?" he groaned, coming to a halt before me. "Those fool doctors won't let me into the army! They tell me I'm too fat to fight. Too fat to fight! Why, I'm a Clavering! We Claverings have all been soldiers."

I sought to calm him. "But surely, Walter," I began, "there are things you can do at home. America needs good men on the sidelines."

He spun on his heel and once more began to waddle to and fro. His face was fiery red and dotted with beads of perspiration; words bubbled up from him in a hysterical outburst.

"The sidelines! That's what they used to tell me at Yale! Must I sit on the sidelines all my life? But I won't! I'll make you all see me as I am! It won't be long now before the doctor and I give you a little surprise!"

"You still see that East Indian quack?" I asked.

"Daily," he replied in a more restrained tone. "He has become my one friend."

"I don't like the man, but I'd rather not argue with you about him," I said soothingly. "I've come here, Walter, to tell you I'm to be married on the third of next month and ask you to come to the wedding."

"You intend marrying Dorothy Pendleton?" he asked.

"Certainly. You'll come to our wedding, won't you?"

Clavering burst out into a shrill, unpleasant laugh. "Haven't I already told you that she belongs to me?" he cried. "If I'm not called to France before next month, you won't have any wedding. If there's any wedding to be celebrated, it will be Dorothy's and mine."

"Don't talk nonsense! This isn't the sort of thing to joke about."

"I wasn't joking," he said very seriously. "Quite the contrary. I mean every word of it. I've kept away from her while you were fighting in France, but now I'm going out to win her."

"Why, I believe you're mad!"

"Perhaps," he muttered, twirling his mustache. "We'll see, Dick."

A few minutes later I left him. I was uncertain as to whether he were mentally unbalanced or attempting a joke in very bad taste.

Although Clavering had always been a victim of ego-mania, these remarks of his overstepped everything he had so far been guilty of. But my irritation soon abated. I began to feel heartily sorry for the poor fellow and determined to see him more often in the future.

IN SPITE of this good resolution, I did not visit Walter again for many days. It is doubtful if I would have gone even then had not his valet dropped in to see me one evening in a very distraught state of mind. At the first glance I could see that the man was extremely worried about something.

"Well, what is it, Tom?" I asked, motioning him to a chair. "Has anything gone wrong at home?"

"I can't say as much as that, sir," he replied, turning his hat round and round in his fingers. "But I'm worried about Mr. Clavering."

"Worried? What is it, Tom?"

"It's the secret way him and that black doctor act, sir. It ain't healthy the way they live; never going out except at night and keeping the shutters closed all day like they was afraid of the blessed sun. And then the doctor cooks all the master's meals for him now; and when he isn't cooking food he's making poisonous-looking green drinks out of goodness only knows what."

"Experimenting with chemicals, Tom?"

"Perhaps, sir. But I don't like to see Mr. Clavering drink them."

"He drinks them?"

"Yes, one every day; and then he goes and locks himself in with the doctor and tells me not to let anyone disturb him."

"Is that all, Tom?"

"No, sir. There's the matter of the black box and the dead man what's in it."

"What are you saying, Tom?"

The valet's solemn face grew long as a horse's, and he passed the tip of his tongue over dry lips. Bending forward, his next few words were spoken in an excited whisper:

"Yes, sir, there's a dead man in a black box in Mr. Clavering's bedroom this very minute. Last night the colored gentleman and three other niggers carried it in. They thought I was in bed and asleep, but I wasn't. No, I saw them carry it in and I followed to Mr. Clavering's room and peeked through the keyhole unbeknownst to them. All the lights in my master's room were lit so that I could see plain what they were about. First, they put the box on the floor and then they pried open the lid. I didn't get but a glimpse when they lifted it out; but, as I hope for salvation some day, it was a corpse, sir."

"Nonsense, Tom."

"I'm telling the truth, sir. But I want you to come and see for yourself. Will you come, sir?"

"You can count on me, Tom."

"Very good, sir. Thanks, sir. It will be a relief to have you see it, too, sir."

NEEDLESS to say I kept my promise. On the following afternoon my taxi drew up before the apartment on Riverside Drive.

As I was striding along the hallway which led to Clavering's apartment, I suddenly encountered a man who must have come out of it a moment before. I only saw this man for an instant, but his personality left an indelible impression. I believe, to this day, I could pick him out of a million.

The man was young, tall and powerfully built. He wore the uniform of an aviator and he wore it with a certain air of ease and distinction. It was as though he had been born for it; as though no other uniform, or dress, could possibly precede or follow it.

But his face was what really arrested my attention. It was strikingly handsome, undoubtedly the handsomest face I had ever seen, and yet somehow its beauty eluded me.

The features were as finely chiseled as a cameo; the forehead broad and intellectual; the eyes wide apart, brilliant and commanding; yet the real charm of that face was in none of these obvious perfections. No, it rested somewhere behind them—a flame, a power, an all-conquering impulse, what you will.

He came striding toward me, and unconsciously I drew aside to let him pass. For a moment his eyes encountered mine and recognition flamed up in their depths. He

smiled, raised his hand in a military salute, and passed on.

"Who can it be?" I muttered, following his tall, upright figure with my eyes. "I must have met him somewhere."

I ransacked my store of memories, but in vain. Surely if I had met him, I must have recognized him instantly. I was certain that I had never seen his face, but there had been something in the movement of his hand which was vaguely familiar.

Still puzzling over my chance encounter, I was admitted by Tom, who promptly showed me into his master's living-room. Here I found the East Indian doctor sitting cross-legged on the divan, and Walter, his mouth agape, his eyes closed, apparently dozing in an easy-chair.

At my appearance the East Indian raised a finger to his lips. "Hush!" he whispered. "He is asleep."

"But it won't do any harm to wake him," I said rather sharply. "I've something important to tell him."

"You must not wake him. Mr. Clavering is not himself today."

"Well, if he's sick, why don't you call in a doctor?"

"I am a doctor," he replied, displaying for an instant a thin line of glistening teeth.

I had no answer ready and contented myself by turning my back and staring out of the window. Finally I spun around and addressed him again.

"Who was that in the corridor a moment ago?"

"In the corridor?"

"Yes. You must know. He had just left here. He bowed to me, but I can't seem to place him."

The East Indian regarded me steadily for a moment before he replied. A thin secretive smile still twitched at his lips.

"That was Mr. Clavering," he said at length.

"Another Clavering? Why, I didn't know Walter had any near relatives."

"He is not a near relative."

I grunted unintelligibly and turned toward Clavering's bedroom. The door stood wide open, and I could see every object in the room.

A large black box, resembling a mummy case, stood upright against one of the walls. Its lid had been pried off. The box was empty.

"Is Walter going in for mummies these days?" I asked.

The East Indian bowed and smiled. "We are both interested in the relics of antiquity," he murmured.

"What have you done with the mummy?"

"Loaned it to some of our associates," he replied, "to whom it is sure to prove of great interest. Do call again when Mr. Clavering is more himself."

I turned to go. But, before passing out, I looked back. The little brown man still sat on the divan. He resembled a Buddha, carved out of mahogany. Clavering sprawled in the easy-chair. His protruding paunch gave an absurd air of inequality to his feet and head.

Somehow the room, the East Indian, my sleeping friend, all combined in affecting me unpleasantly. I was glad to get out into the street. But before quitting the house I tried to set Tom"s mind at rest by telling him that his dead man had turned out to be a mummy. It is doubtful if I succeeded in my good intentions.

I WENT STRAIGHT from Clavering's apartment to visit Dorothy and found her in the library. At the first glance I realized that she had some-

how changed. She greeted me with none of her usual warmth. There was no spontaneity in the pressure of her lips. She kissed me as though it were an unpleasant duty which had to be gotten over with.

As a rule, I am rather quick to respond to impressions. I hadn't been in that library five minutes before I knew that something had happened to Dorothy which had entirely changed her attitude toward me.

She looked at me impersonally as though I were a piece of furniture. I felt, indeed, that she did not really see me at all. Her eyes seemed to be looking far byond me; and a light, such as I had never been able to kindle, glowed in their depths.

At first I pretended not to notice anything. Seating myself opposite her, I began to talk about our marriage and our plans for the future. Here was a topic which had always held for both of us an unflagging interest, but today I could see that it kindled no enthusiasm in Dorothy. She spoke in disconnected monosyllables which told me that her imagination was far afield.

"By the way, Dorothy," I said at length, "I saw an old admirer of yours this afternoon."

"Who?" she asked, without the slightest flicker of animation.

"Why, your old flame, Clavering. Don't tell me that you've forgotten Walter Clavering!"

For the first time that afternoon Dorothy showed signs of returning interest. She started involuntarily and a slow tide of color crept into her cheeks.

"He's just as much in love with you as ever," I continued, smiling. "He claims that he's going to take you away from me. Now, if he looked anything like that young aviator relative of his, I wouldn't be so sure of myself."

"You met him, Dick?"

It was my turn to start. Dorothy's apathy had turned to unbridled excitement.

"Yes. I ran into him coming out of Walter's apartment this afternoon. But what's the matter, Dorothy? You don't know him, do you?"

"Yes," she answered, striving to speak naturally but failing miserably at it. "I met him this afternoon, too. It's the strangest thing that ever happened to me. I don't know how to explain it."

"You met him? But how could you? I thought you'd been in the house all day."

"I—I have," Dorothy said breathlessly. "He—he came here. I don't know how he got in, unless he found the door on the latch."

"He came here?" I repeated, amazed. "You must have been dreaming, Dorothy."

"No, I wasn't! He came right into this room as though he owned it, as though he owned me. Now, it seems so strange, Dick! But, at the time, it didn't—it seemed quite natural."

"And you had never met him before?"

"Never. If I had, I couldn't have forgotten him. He was so unusual-looking."

"But what excuse did he make for tramping into your house like that?" I asked, beginning to grow angry.

"Excuse?" Dorothy said, with a wan smile. "He never attempted to make any excuse. He just said: 'I've come to show you another Walter Clavering,' and then he took me in his big, strong arms and kissed me."

"He kissed you?" I cried, jumping up in a fury. "The insolent puppy! By God, I'll look him up for this!"

"He kissed me," Dorothy continued, with a dreamy light in her large hazel eyes, "and I kissed him.

Now, don't get angry, Dick. That doesn't do any good. I kissed him because I couldn't help it."

"He forced you?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't help it, because I wanted to so much myself. It seemed the only natural thing to do. It's only fair that I should be truthful with you, Dick."

"Go on," I said between set teeth. "What else happened?"

"There isn't much more to tell. He only stayed a moment. He did say something about wanting to marry me, and he would only he had to go to war. And then he said: 'You'll hear of me. I'll do things over there that will make you glad you're in love with me.'"

"Another modest Clavering!" I cried in desperation. "What shrinking violets these fellows are!"

"But it didn't seem like boasting from him," Dorothy resumed. "No, everything he said fitted him somehow. I believed him."

"You must be extremely gullible," I said bitterly. "But what else happened?"

"That was practically all, Dick. He kissed me again. Then he went and I began to cry."

DOROTHY'S EYES were veiled with tears. As for me, I began to pace the room in an agony of rage and apprehension.

Only an hour before I had felt certain that she returned my love; and yet now I was suddenly informed that she had allowed an unknown man to make violent love to her! It was amazing, unbelievable! What would become of our married life if such indiscretions were possible?

"Of course there is only one thing to do," Dorothy said, after a time. "We must break our engagement, Dick. It wouldn't be fair to marry you."

"But why? You've told me everything and I'll forget it."

"It isn't that, Dick. But there are other things that you couldn't forget—I'm in love with another man."

"Don't be ridiculous!" I cried. "It's impossible! You can't fall in love with a man whom you only see for five minutes! Dorothy, be reasonable! Don't ruin both our lives on account of this absurd infatuation!"

But she only shook her head and tightened her lips. Tears of pity for me and herself overflowed her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

"I'm so sorry, Dick," she repeated over and over again. "Impossible as it may seem, I love him. You wouldn't have me marry you when I feel like that?"

At last, worn out, defeated, humbled, I stumbled from the room. I had gained nothing by my pleading except her pity and the promise that she would not break our engagement if the marriage were postponed till she had time to thoroughly analyze her emotions. Nothing but a few shreds of my former happiness remained.

CHAPTER V

MAD?

THE next few months of my life were the unhappiest I had ever known. Although I saw Dorothy daily, her attitude of aloofness did not change for the better. She was never again as near to me as she had been prior to her maniacal adventure with the aviator. The shadow of the man, the shadow of a Clavering, had fallen between us.

If it had been something tangible that I could have grappled with, if my rival had been present in the flesh and blood, it would not have been so discouraging. Unfortu-

nately I was trying to erase a momentary impression from her mind —an heroic picture which, because it had been so fleeting, could lose nothing of its glamor. Thus it is always in life—the years come and the years go; it is only the scattered, blinding seconds we remember.

TO MAKE matters worse, that mysterious young man, who had played such havoc with my happiness, began to live up to his promise to Dorothy.

Dispatches from the front began to sing the praises of a Clavering who was accomplishing surprising feats over the German trenches. It seemed there was no risk he would not take. Soon he was hailed as a leading ace in America's flying forces, an aviator of whom the whole country was justly proud.

One afternoon, after reading of one of his daring exploits, I called at the Riverside Drive apartment to question my old roommate about him. I wanted to learn all I could as a precaution for the future. And then, if the truth must be told, I longed to hear something to his discredit.

Walter had never mentioned the man to me, and I felt fairly certain that this strange reticence must spring from the fear of disclosing a black sheep in the family fold. The Clavering I had known at New Haven was far from being close-mouthed about the deeds of any illustrious member of his race. No, Walter had been silent for a reason and I intended to ferret out this reason.

Clavering's valet opened the door for me. He was ordinarily a solemn man with the look of a church deacon about him, but that afternoon he appeared positively funereal.

"Is Mr. Clavering at home, Tom?"

"Yes, he's at home, right enough, sir," the man replied, with a queer look. "But, to tell you the truth, Mr. Dawson, he's——"

"He's what, Tom?"

"Well, sir, he's not altogether himself."

"You mean he's sick, Tom? Laid up in bed, perhaps?"

"Oh, no, sir! He's not laid up in bed! Quite the contrary, sir. He and that foreign gentleman a r e that lively! You should see them hopping about, Mr. Dawson, just like crickets!"

"Then what do you mean, Tom?" I asked, bewildered.

"I mean, sir, that Mr. Clavering doesn't seem to be all right here," Tom replied, tapping his forehead with a solemn forefinger. "I'm liberal-minded enough not to mind a gentleman having his bit of fun; but when it comes to his playing with tin soldiers like a child of ten, I think he should be pulled up short, sir."

The valet's information verified all the fears I had sometimes entertained for my old friend. Evidently his brain, always a plaything for egomania, had at last collapsed entirely. It was plainly my duty to see if something could not be rescued from the ruins.

"Take me to him, Tom," I commanded.

"Very well, sir. But I wanted to warn you first. You'll be most surprised at Mr. Clavering's doings."

TOM WAS RIGHT. I was surprised by what I found in the living-room. In fact, I doubt if I shall ever be able to forget that strange scene.

Walter sat all hunched up in one of those toy aeroplanes which for the last few years have become so popular among children. There was a grim look in his round, red face. He held in one hand a small torpedo, such as boys invest their savings in to celebrate the Fourth of July.

On all sides of him, drawn up in battle array, were rows and rows of tin soldiers. The East Indian sat in his usual position on the divan and contemplated Clavering with an enigmatic stare.

Naturally I was bowled over by this idiotic scene. Coming to a halt on the threshold, I started involuntarily at an unexpected noise. Walter had thrown the toy torpedo at the foremost rank of tin soldiers and it had exploded with a sound like the popping of a cork.

The East Indian rose and tiptoed over to me. He approached with the slinking, stealthy movements of a cat.

"Hush!" he whispered. "You must not disturb him. Mr. Clavering is not himself today."

"I should think not!" I muttered. "Why, the poor fellow is stark, staring mad!"

"Ah, no, not mad," the East Indian replied with a deprecatory gesture of his thin, brown hands. "Mr. Clavering amuses himself. But, rest assured, he is quite content and even happy."

"Mad!" I repeated, looking past him at poor Walter, who with great earnestness was preparing to throw another torpedo. "As mad as any man I've ever seen! He should be sent to a sanatorium!"

At this the East Indian drew himself up to his full height with an air of ridiculous importance. "Perhaps you forget that I am a practicing physician," he said very slowly. "Mr. Clavering's case is in my hands."

What could I do after that? I was powerless to interfere. This dried-up mummy of a man was perfectly within his rights if he ordered me out of the apartment. But I did essay a few protests.

"Of course, I have no authority—I'm not one of his family, or anything like that—but it seems to me that Mr. Clavering would get better attention in a sanatorium."

"Ah, that is true, he might get better attention, perhaps. But would he be so contented, so happy? Here he is like a playful child. He amuses himself all day with his little games. I assure you that——"

But at this instant the second torpedo struck the floor and exploded with an even more nerve-jarring report than the first. It was followed by a delightful chuckle from the idiotic figure doubled up in the toy aeroplane.

"Bagged 'em, by God!" Clavering cried shrilly. "Come on, you Huns!"

"You see how happy he is?" the East Indian murmured in my ear. "We should envy him, you and I."

Turning away with a shudder, I was making for the outer door when I heard the doctor's slippered feet padding behind me and felt his hand laid lightly on my arm.

"Come again," he whispered. "Soon I expect a change for the better or for the worse. It promises to be a most interesting case."

CHAPTER VI

THE HONOR OF THE CLAVERINGS

NATURALLY I was shocked by poor Clavering's mental condition. It seemed to me that the East Indian was a designing rascal who had laid a trap for Walter with the ultimate intention of robbing him.

By feeding him his patient's absurd egotism to the bursting point, surely he was directly responsible for that ridiculous and yet pathetic scene I had witnessed in the living-room of my friends's apartment.

But, in spite of my anxiety for Clavering, I did not visit him again for several weeks. My own troubles occupied me to the exclusion of everything else.

Dorothy remained the same. Although she never told me, I knew that she spent her time poring over the newspapers. She must have been well repaid for her pains. Scarcely a day went by during that last year of the war when some reference to Walter's namesake was not made by the press. A score of German planes had fallen before him; it was said that the enemy's aviators gave him a wide berth.

What chance had I to win back Dorothy's affections from this modern Ivanhoe? By now he was caparisoned from head to foot in the glittering armor of romance and adventure; the whole world was war-mad and echoing to his praises; and I was but a piece of wreckage which had served its purpose and been set adrift.

Dorothy was unfailingly kind and considerate. She never alluded to the aviator in my presence; but I knew that the vision of the man was always before her. He had cast a reflection in the luminous depths of her eyes which would remain unchanging to the end.

TWO MONTHS elapsed before I visited Clavering again. As on the previous occasion, Tom opened the door for me. The man looked even more solemn than when I had seen him last.

"Well, how is Mr. Clavering?" I asked.

"Poorly, sir," Tom answered with a lugubrious shake of his head. "I don't know rightly what will happen to the poor gentleman after I leave his service."

"You're leaving, Tom?"

"Yes, sir. I gave notice this morning."

"But why, Tom?"

The valet surveyed me solemnly and reproachfully for a moment before he answered. He was evidently chewing the cud of his grievance.

"Well, sir," he said at last, "I took service as a gentleman's valet, not as keeper in a private lunatic asylum. It's not healthy, sir, to watch their antics day after day."

"Their antics?"

"Yes, sir. You saw how Mr. Clavering behaved on your last visit. Most scandalous, I call it, for a portly gentleman like him. But that foreign doctor is just as bad. He aids and abets him in his antics; lining up tin soldiers for him to knock over and giving him handfuls of torpedoes to explode.

"What with the racket going on continually, it's enough to deafen a man. Well, I stood it all till this morning, although my head used to swim. But there is a limit to human endurance; and, asking your pardon, sir, I've reached it."

"What happened this morning, Tom?"

"Why, I was washing up the breakfast things when, all of a sudden, I heard a crash which sounded like the whole house falling down about my ears. So I dropped everything and ran into the living-room."

"And then, Tom?"

"Well, sir, there was that toy aeroplane smashed into bits, and there was Mr. Clavering lying on his back with the tin soldiers all about him."

"Did he hurt himself?"

"Yes, sir. When we lifted him up, he was as limp as a piece of rope. At first I thought he was dead, he looked so queer. But pretty soon he began to breathe again, and the doctor said that he'd come around all right."

"Take me in, Tom."

THE VALET conducted me in silence to the living-room. It presented a far different appearance from when I had seen it last. Clavering lay on the divan with his eyes closed. He was apparently still unconscious.

The East Indian rose to welcome me. I pretended not to see his extended hand and merely nodded to him.

"I see Mr. Clavering has hurt himself," I said.

"Yes, Mr. Dawson. It was fortunate that it was no worse. Mr. Clavering had quite a fall. The aeroplane was smashed to bits."

"How did it happen?"

The East Indian shrugged his shoulders. "Aeroplanes often fall. One cannot tell exactly why. Sometimes it is engine trouble, sometimes——"

"Don't joke, man," I broke in irritably. "Toy aeroplanes can't fall, unless they're pushed. Well, I should think that this accident would make you see that I am right. He shouldn't stay here when he's in this mental state. He couldn't break his head in a sanatorium."

"He might break his heart."

"Nonsense!"

My eyes wandered to Clavering. His lips were moving. Strange guttural sounds were coming from them. His round, red face wore a ferocious scowl.

"Are you determined to keep him here?" I demanded. "If so, I shall take steps to have him sent to a sanatorium."

"I advise you not to interfere, Mr. Dawson," the East Indian said very earnestly. "I assure you that this is the very best place for Mr. Clavering. I believe that in a few more days he will be out of danger."

"Very well," I said, turning on my heel. "I'll do nothing at present. But if he's not greatly improved the next time I call, I'll take the matter up with the authorities."

"I will be perfectly satisfied with your decision," the East Indian answered, with one of his dazzling smiles. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Dawson."

Before quitting the apartment, I drew Tom aside. I felt that I must have a loyal henchman within the walls. I knew that I could depend on the man.

"Tom," I said, handing him a twenty-dollar bill, "I want you to stay here until I call again."

"But why, sir?"

"Well, to be quite frank, I don't trust that East Indian doctor and I want an honest man about the premises to see that everything goes smoothly."

The valet, as I had thought, was not impervious to flattery. My implied trust in his integrity had more weight with him than the twenty-dollar bill. He accepted with alacrity.

"And, Tom," I added, "if anything unusual happens, you can get in touch with me."

"Very well, sir."

A MOMENT later I was on the street, strolling toward the nearest entrance. A newsboy came trotting up to me, shouting hoarsely: "Extra! Extra! Clavering killed! Extra! Extra!"

My heart seemed to rise up in my throat and choke me. I stopped the newsboy and bought a paper. The headlines danced before my eyes for an instant and then became distinct and stationary. I read as follows:

AMERICAN ACE FALLS

Walter Clavering is believed to have met his death this afternoon while flying over the German trenches. What actually happened will never be known. Some think that a stray bullet must have found its mark, others that he lost control of his engine; but the plane which carried him in so many victorious combats came crashing down to earth well within the enemy's territory. Wilbur Thorpe, another intrepid flyer, later reconnoitered the spot where Clavering fell. He reported that he had seen the wrecked aeroplane through his

glasses and that it was nothing but a mass of splinters and twisted steel. The inference to be gathered is plain. It is a sad day for America—we have lost our ace of aces.

It may have been a sad day for America, but it was a happy day for me. I will not attempt to disguise the fact that I was overjoyed at the news of my heroic rival's fall. A man in love is a selfish brute where other men are concerned.

CHAPTER VII

A MODEST CLAVERING

AT FIRST Dorothy was prostrated by the news of the aviator's death. There followed a long period when she clung to the faint hope that he had not been killed but had been taken prisoner. But as the weeks and months passed with no news which could verify such a conclusion, she at last resigned herself to her loss.

Now was my hour to strike. I lost no time in pressing my suit. I called on her daily and begged her not to put off our marriage any longer. Finally I gained my point.

"But suppose he were still alive?" Dorothy said on the evening when I won her consent. "I couldn't help loving him if he came back, Dick."

"He's surely dead," I replied a trifle sourly. "No man could fall from that height and live. They say his plane was smashed to kindling."

I felt Dorothy trembling in my arms. "Oh, how terrible, Dick!" she murmured.

"Don't think of it," I said patiently. "Try to think of our marriage next week. Where would you like to spend the honeymoon?"

She gave me a curious look. "You're still anxious to marry me, Dick, when you know that I'm in love with another man?"

"I know nothing of the kind!" I retorted angrily. "No girl could possibly be in love with a man she sees only once. You were never in love with this Clavering, Dorothy; you were in love with a chimera."

"Perhaps," she murmured with tears in her eyes. "But, if he was a chimera, he was an unusually vivid one."

DOROTHY and I were married on the fifteenth of the month and spent a brief honeymoon in Atlantic City. Among the numerous letters of congratulations we received, was a note from Clavering's valet which ran as follows:

DEAR SIR:

I take the liberty of writing you about Mr. Clavering as directed. He's been acting most strange for the last few days. After his accident, he wouldn't move out of his chair for most a week; but now he walks continual. Up and down the room he goes, both day and night. He doesn't seem to take any rest. I believe, sir, that he'll walk himself into his grave if he isn't stopped.

Your obedient servant,
THOMAS HEDGEGROW.

I intended answering this note immediately; but, as many another man has done on his honeymoon, I let my own happiness fall like a curtain between me and the harsh realities of life. Clavering and his misfortune must wait their turn.

We returned on the day when the Armistice was declared to find the city given over to a delirium of joy. Manhattan Island was a seething vortex of wildly excited humanity, a swift tide which swept us off our feet. On the following morning I received Tom's second communication:

DEAR SIR:

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that Mr. Clavering appears to have recovered. He is more like his old self now than he has been for many months. I am speaking now about his mind. He no longer plays those childish games. Perhaps the fall did him good.

I know he would be very pleased to see you. Couldn't you come and visit him some time soon?

Respectfully,
THOMAS HEDGEGROW.

ON THE following day I acted on Tom's suggestion. I called at the apartment and was almost immediately admitted by the valet, who appeared to have aged considerably since I had seen him last.

"Well, are there any new developments?" I asked.

"Not a blessed thing, sir. You'll find Mr. Clavering greatly improved."

"Has the East Indian been with him all the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let's investigate, Tom."

"Very well, sir. Your hat and stick. Thank you, sir."

I found that Tom had not exaggerated. Although Walter looked far from well, there was at least the light of sanity in his eyes as he greeted me.

"Well, if it isn't Dick!" Clavering cried in exactly the same tone he had used a thousand times in our college days. "It's good to see you, Dick!"

I glanced at him in blank amazement. It seemed unbelievable that the raving maniac I had seen so short a time before, sitting in a toy aeroplane and throwing torpedoes at tin soldiers, could have so miraculously changed. The man was sane. Sanity was in every tone of his voice.

"You're feeling better?" I asked solicitously.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "just dog-tired, since I got back."

"Since you got back? I didn't know——"

But at this instant the East Indian signaled me to silence with a finger lifted to his lips. Of course, that was it. The poor fellow believed he had been away all the time that he had been mad. It was better to humor him. Perhaps he still had other delusions.

"It must be a satisfaction to know that your family was so well represented in the war," I said, changing the subject. "Your relative, the aviator, has become one of our national heroes."

To my amazement, he turned scarlet and averted his face. "Don't talk nonsense!" he said brusquely. "It was just luck. Any other man could have done the same thing."

"Nothing of the sort!" I retorted rather hotly, for, strange to tell, now that I considered my rival safely under-ground, I lost no chance of extolling his courage to anyone but Dorothy. "It's easy to say that a hero is only a lucky man. No, it takes more than luck, Walter."

"I wish you'd cut out all this sort of talk, Dick," Clavering said uncomfortably. "It makes me rather self-conscious."

I was again thoroughly amazed. Here was Walter, once the braggard of college fame, the man who fairly reveled in the fame of his family, now turning as bashful as a schoolgirl because I referred to his relative's undoubted heroism.

What a change! But was it a change, or merely a carefully assumed pose.

LATER I came to the opinion that his new found modesty was quite genuine. It was as though he had been drained dry of the bitterness of impotency which so often finds expression in vainglorious words; as though he had proved all those wild boasts of his by-deeds, and that now there was nothing more to say.

We talked for some time longer about trifling matters which I suggested so as not to tax his rehabilitated mind. But, at last, he took the reins out of my hands and guided our

conversation back into more personal matters.

"And how is Miss Pendleton?" he asked at length. "Do you see her often?"

"I see her every day," I replied. "She's no longer Miss Pendleton but Mrs. Dawson."

"You married her, Dick?" Clavering's face had darkened and a frown drew his heavy eyebrows together. "Do you think that was fair?"

"Fair?" I repeated, quite at a loss. "What do you mean by fair? Fair to whom?"

"Why, fair to me," he said solemnly. "While you were away I didn't attempt to see her. I thought that you might respect my absence."

Was he attempting to joke, or was Dorothy the one obsession which still remained with him? I glanced at Walter and saw, to my amazement, that his huge spectacles were blurred with tears.

"Well, no matter," he said after a moment. "You didn't know and therefore I shouldn't have expected you to act otherwise. It was necessary to sacrifice her. To serve, one must sacrifice."

"I don't think I understand," I muttered.

And then something of the old Walter showed itself for an instant. It was not so much in the ridiculous statement he made as in the manner in which he offered it, with lifted double-chin and elevated eyebrows.

"Your wife is perfectly safe from me now, Dick," he said pompously, fingering his mustache. "I relinquish her to you. It is an unwritten law among us Claverings that the wives of our friends are inviolable."

"Thanks," I muttered, barely suppressing a smile.

"Don't thank me," he retorted. "Sometimes I think I'm unfortunate to have been born a Clavering."

A few minutes later I took my departure with the promise that I would soon return. Tom conducted me to the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WHO ESCAPED

MY financial affairs had prospered during the war. I was now in a position to give Dorothy the luxuries to which she was accustomed.

She preferred living in the country and so I bought a place on Long Island within easy commuting distance. Next I purchased an automobile which could pass almost everything on the road.

I saw little of Clavering after we moved out of the city. The few times I dropped in at Riverside Drive, he appeared to be normal enough mentally; but physically he looked far from well, although he never complained about his health.

A year slipped by during which I had not seen him more than two or three times all told; and then one day I received a letter in his familiar hand-writing which caused me a twinge of conscience. I quote it here:

DEAR DICK:

Of late my health has been failing. Some time ago, I had a fall which left me with internal injuries. Not to mince matters, I'm not long for this mad, old world of ours.

There are matters which I would like to talk over with you before I go. You have always taken an unselfish interest in me and I wish to repay you if I can. Couldn't you drop in next Tuesday evening and stay overnight?

Affectionately,

WALTER.

IT IS needless to say, under the circumstances, that I couldn't very well refuse Clavering's invitation. Tuesday evening I motored into New

York, leaving Dorothy to amuse herself as best she could.

It took me less than an hour to reach the apartment house. I mounted the familiar steps and rang Walter's bell.

Tom had stayed on, in spite of his threats to leave, and now opened the door for me. He couldn't have been more funereal looking if Walter had been already dead and he were admitting the undertaker.

"Is Mr. Clavering very sick?" I asked.

"He's dying, sir," Tom answered gloomily. "Didn't I always tell you that the capers he and that foreign doctor used to cut would put him in his grave? A big, portly gentleman, sir, can't carry on like a boy of ten."

I found Walter lying on the divan. The poor fellow was as fat as ever; but his florid complexion had turned to a sickly green shade and there were great, black hollows under his nearsighted eyes. He greeted me with a rather pathetic smile.

"I'm glad you came, Dick," he said, offering me a pale, plump hand. "I didn't know whether you or old Sergeant Death would get here first."

"Nonsense," I muttered. "You'll outlive us all, Walter."

But he shook his head. "No, I'm about all in, Dick. But I didn't bring you here to talk about that. Do you mind ringing that bell on the table."

I DID as he asked me, and almost immediately the East Indian came gliding into the room. On seeing me, he came to a halt and bowed ceremoniously.

"We need the doctor's help tonight to convince you," Clavering said easily. "Have a chair, doctor."

"To convince me?"

"Yes, I'm going to give you a practical demonstration of something you don't believe is possible. But first I want you to understand everything."

Clavering was silent for a moment and I could see by his intent look that he was attempting to mentally visualize what he was about to tell me. At that moment, and in fact during the entire evening, he seemed perfectly sane.

"No doubt the direst tragedy that mankind may fall heir to," he resumed quietly, "is the tragedy of the misplaced soul. If it's intended as a joke by the Maker of us all, it's a cruel joke."

"But I don't think I understand," I broke in. "What exactly do you mean, Walter, when you say the tragedy of the misplaced soul?"

"I am the living example of it," he said very earnestly. "This fat, grotesque body of mine houses the soul of a Clavering. Surely there is tragedy in that; the tragedy of the flame in the pumpkin. Within the cocoon of poor Walter Clavering was the butterfly which might never have been. Hamlet would scarcely be so effective if he spoke his lines through a pig's snout."

He paused to wipe gleaming beads of perspiration from his forehead. His large, flabby face was working with emotion.

"On all sides, we see men such as I," he continued after a moment, "men who, if Nature had been kinder, would have been heroes instead of clowns. But they never have a chance because the world judges them on their face value. We fat men, we human jelly-bags, are imprisoned in our walls of flesh while our jailers lash us through a ritual of humor. Born buffoons, we must remain so till we die. Or else——"

"Or else?" I broke in.

"Or else find some avenue of escape, as I did," he replied quietly.

"You escaped?"

"YES. But I must begin at the beginning. You remember meeting me

on the train that first day we went up to New Haven? Well, Dick, you must have thought me a conceited ass."

"I have thought you were a bit egotistical at times," I answered.

"All game-cocks crow a bit before they win their gaffs," he said with a smile. "If I had been given a chance during those early days in college, you would have found me as modest a football hero as ever won a game for Yale. I couldn't sweat out my egotism with the Varsity and so it found another form of expression. It's easy enough to be modest, when one has a chance to show what one can do."

"But why were you so sure of yourself all along, Walter?"

"There was something in here which wouldn't be downed," Clavering answered, touching himself on the chest. "The more you fellows guyed me, the surer I was that I could win for Yale as my father had done before me. And then, when I finally got in and blocked that kick, the whole thing was so idiotically simple that I took no pride in it at all."

"And later?" I asked.

"Why, later, in New York, it was just the same. There was Dorothy, for instance. How could I make her love me when she couldn't see me as I really was? The real Walter Clavering didn't have pop-eyes like a frog and a radish for a nose. No, the real Walter Clavering was the man she grew to love."

UP TO THIS, Walter, although apparently excited and overwrought, had talked sensibly enough. Now, for the first time that evening, he forsook the well-trodden path of probability.

"Dorothy meant everything to me, Dick," he continued. "I simply couldn't give her up to you without a struggle. The doctor, here, showed me how I might win her. One night he and I had a long talk. He has made a study of the religious cults in India. As perhaps you know, Dick, their religious beliefs are more closely woven into the pattern of their lives than ours. Their faith embraces science, invention, art and metaphysics."

"Well?" I asked.

"Well, I was complaining about my body to the doctor and he said quite simply: 'Why don't you shake it off like a snake shakes off its skin?'

"He asked me if I had ever seen a chimera and then he said: 'A chimera of anything—a city, a lake, a tree—is that city, lake or tree as it really is, as it was dreamed to be and created to be. A chimera is the soul, or the essence which has escaped. Man is often inferior to his creator's dream. He is a disappointment to himself and others. But he may have a chimera, a soul, a psychic body which is the essence of his creator's dream. Let him, then, discard his unworthy flesh and let him live only in his chimera.' "

"A rather difficult operation, I should think," I murmured, glancing ironically at the East Indian.

"Yes, it takes many months to escape," Clavering said solemnly. "One must believe implicitly, and that's no easy matter. Probably I would never have succeeded if it had not been for Dorothy and the war."

"But you did escape?"

"You should know," he said with disquieting simplicity. "You saw me as I really am one afternoon—that afternoon when Dorothy learned to love me."

AN INVOLUNTARY tremor shook me. For an instant I once more seemed to see the aviator's tall commanding figure striding past me in the hall. What a shadow that man had cast between Dorothy and

me, a shadow which persisted even now. For an instant, I say, I seemed to see him; and then I glanced at Clavering with the aggressive paunch and lacklustre eyes. What nonsense he was talking! The poor fellow was still quite mad.

"You don't believe me," he said after a moment. "Well, I'm not surprised. But that doesn't alter the fact that everything I've told you is strictly the truth. The man in the aviator's uniform you saw that afternoon was I, Dick; the real I, clothed in flesh of my own choosing. That aviator was the soul of Walter Clavering housed in its proper mansion of bone and sinew."

"What nonsense you are talking, man!"

"No, the truth, Dick. Let me try to explain everything. The doctor here discovered a drug which releases the soul from the body. So far, so good. I could escape this malformed mass of flesh whenever I wished. But it became necessary for me to find another body, an appropriate body, in which to house myself, in order to do all these heroic deeds which I craved. A soul without a body is as helpless as a body without a soul."

"What madness, Walter!"

"Once again the doctor came to my assistance," Clavering continued unheedingly. "He knew of an aviator—a young Hercules—who had an incurable malady of the heart. He went to this young man on his deathbed and bought his body from him. Such things are common enough. The aviator was overjoyed to sell something, for which he would soon have no further use, for a sum of money that would keep his mother comfortably all the rest of her days. It was a business matter, pure and simple. That night the body was brought here in a black box."

"The mummy case!" I cried in amazement.

"Yes, you thought it contained a mummy. But it didn't; it contained the body you saw walking out of my apartment that afternoon. I was in that body, Dick; I went to the war in it. Men have called me a hero in it. You know what happened afterward. That beautiful body of mine, that body that suited me in every detail, was shot down over the German lines. It was smashed to fragments; it could no longer hold me. And so the soul of Walter Clavering unwillingly winged back to this discarded hulk."

"Madness!" I cried desperately. "Sheer madness!"

"No; not madness, Dick," he answered patiently. "It is very simple, I assure you. The doctor will show you how it is done. He calls it 'soul transfusion'." His nearsighted eyes left my face and became fixed on the East Indian. "Would you oblige Mr. Dawson, doctor, by a demonstration?"

The brown man rose and silently left the room. Walter and I were alone again. A smile of pleased expectancy hovered about his lips.

A LONG SILENCE fell between us. It was growing late. The Grandfather clock in the living-room ceased its contented ticking to strike three. And, as though this were a signal which had been agreed upon, at that instant the East Indian reentered the room. He held a glass which contained a fluid the color and consistency of milk, but which emanated a purplish vapor that lingered in the air like smoke.

Clavering stretched out an eager hand for the glass. At the moment he seemed to regain all the strength which had been sapped by sickness. His eyes, behind their enormous

spectacles, glowed with a strange light.

"Now for the practical demonstration, Dick!" he cried. For an instant as my soul leaves my body, you will see Walter Clavering as he really is!"

HE WAS interrupted by the violent ringing of the telephone bell. It was as though it were crying out in shrill expostulation at his wild words.

"Just a moment," I said, taking the receiver off the hook. "I'll answer it for you. It may be important."

Clavering had raised the glass of milky fluid to his lips. A frown of impatience at the interruption drew his heavy eyebrows together over his nose.

"Hello!" I called. "Whom do you wish to speak with?"

There followed a moment's silence and then Dorothy's voice came to me very faintly over the wire. It had odd breaks in it as though she had great difficulty in getting her breath.

"Is that you, Dick? Oh, something terrible has happened! I don't know what to do! I'm afraid!"

"What has happened?" I demanded as calmly as I could.

"Oh, Dick, what shall I do? Thieves have broken into the house! I can hear them tramping about downstairs."

"Thieves have broken into the house?" I repeated mechanically. "Are you sure, Dorothy?"

"Yes, I am. They know you're away or they wouldn't make so much noise."

"Now listen carefully, Dorothy," I said. "Lock yourself in. Don't open the door till I get there. I'll come soon, Dorothy. Be brave!"

"I'll try—but I'm so frightened, Dick!"

I THREW DOWN the receiver and turned toward the door. Blind, unreasoning fear had taken possession of me. My only thought was to reach Dorothy's side as soon as possible. God only knew what might happen to her in that lonely house!

"Just a moment!" Clavering called in a voice which somehow spun me around on my heels. "You don't want to go out there without a gun. There's a revolver in my bedroom. Show him where it is, doctor."

The East Indian put his hand on my arm and led me quickly into the adjoining room. It was pitch-dark and he lost several precious seconds fumbling for the electric switch. The revolver lay on the glass top of the bureau. Snatching it up, I was about to hurry out when my companion detained me.

"Even an excellent revolver is useless without cartridges," he said smoothly in his perfect English. "You must have patience while I find you some.

"Hurry!" I cried in a fever of apprehension as he peered into one of the bureau drawers. "For God's sake, hurry!"

A moment later he handed me a box of cartridges and I dashed back into the living-room. Clavering was nowhere to be seen, so I hurried out into the street.

BUT WHEN I stepped out on Riverside Drive, all my strength seemed to leave me. It was as though I had just received a violent blow in the pit of my stomach. Sick, trembling, I clung to a friendly tree and stared wildly at the empty street. There was reason enough for despair. My high-powered motor car—the car on which I had counted to carry me home in record time—no longer

stood beside the curb. It had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST HEROIC GESTURE

HOW long I stood there I have no means of ascertaining. I was brought to myself by a light tap on the arm. Turning, I looked straight into the brown, enigmatic face of the East Indian.

"My car has been stolen," I muttered.

"So I observed from the window," he said quietly. "I took the liberty of calling up the nearest garage and ordering another. It should be here at any moment now."

Hardly had he spoken before a taxi turned the corner and drew up before the apartment house. The driver eyed me askance and touched his cap.

"Mr. Dawson?" he asked.

My presence of mind returned. Giving the chauffeur my address and promising him a fifty-dollar bill if we arrived at our destination under a half-hour, I climbed into the taxi closely followed by the East Indian. The driver threw in his gears and the car bounded forward.

NOT A WORD was spoken during that ride. Our pace must have been a furious one, but to me it seemed as if we crawled along.

Staring out of the window at the houses, trees and telegraph poles which appeared to be careering past, my imagination far outstripped the car. It would go bounding ahead over the macadamized road which was graying with the first light of dawn—far ahead, swinging up a familiar drive and at last entering a familiar house where it stood aghast at a scene of tragedy.

It was daylight when we finally breasted the hill where the house stood. As we drew up before the veranda, I noted that the lights in the living-room were all burning.

Leaping out of the taxi, I mounted the front steps and found the front door wide open and admitting a sickly yellow light which struggled vainly with the newborn day. Not pausing for an instant, I hurried in.

The living-room was in wild confusion. A picture had been torn from the wall, several chairs had been knocked over, the center table had been broken, and my safe gaped foolishly in one corner. The air seemed tainted with the acrid odor of burned powder.

All this was almost instantly photographed on my brain. I did not linger in the living-room a moment. No, I dashed through it and up the central staircase, two steps at a time. A moment later I heard low, suppressed sobs and came to a halt before my wife's door.

"Dorothy!" I called.

The sobs ceased almost instantly. I could hear her moving toward me.

"Dorothy!" I called again. "Don't worry. It's Dick."

NOW THE door swung slowly open and she confronted me. Never in my life have I seen a more tragic face than hers. Sorrow and a haunting fear were stamped on it for the world to see.

"Why, Dorothy!" I cried, stepping forward to take her in my arms. "You mustn't look like that! It's all over now."

But she avoided my caress. "No, Dick," she murmured with an involuntary shudder. "Please don't! Not like this—over his dead body."

"Over his dead body?" I repeated. "Why, what do you mean, Dorothy? No one is dead."

"You can't hide it from me!" she cried. "I saw everything. I was standing at the head of the stairs

when they shot him. He's dead, Dick."

"Tell me all about it," I said, thinking that perhaps talking might relieve her. "Calm yourself and tell me."

"You remember when I called you up, Dick," she began, "you told me to lock myself in? Well; I did that and sat down by the window. How slowly the time passed! I could hear the burglars moving about downstairs, and I prayed they would stay there. Suddenly I heard your car tearing up the hill."

"My car, Dorothy?"

"Yes, I know the sound of the engine. Well, then I unlocked the door, crept out into the hall and looked down over the banisters. I could see two men on their knees before the safe. As the car stopped before the veranda, they both sprang to their feet and one of them drew a revolver."

"And then what happened, Dorothy?"

"Why, then the outside door opened. I thought it was you, Dick, and I wanted to warn you not to come into the living-room. I knew the man with the revolver would shoot. But before I could move or cry out, he came running in."

"He?"

"Why, your old friend, Walter Clavering," Dorothy said in a low voice. "But he didn't look exactly as I remembered him. There was something in the way he held his shoulders, in his smile; for he *was* smiling, Dick; that made me feel quite safe somehow. And even after the revolver went off, I didn't think anything could harm either him or me."

"One of the thieves shot at him?" I asked.

"Yes, and then they both dodged past him and ran away. They must have been frightened out of their wits. They ran like rabbits."

"And then *he* fell?"

"Not at first, Dick. He caught sight of me and waved his hand. Then I saw him stagger and try to support himself by leaning on the table. It gave way beneath him and they both came crashing to the floor. Then everything went black before my eyes. I know I didn't faint and yet I remember nothing more till I heard you calling me."

"But he's not in the living-room now. I give you my word he's not there."

"Take me downstairs, Dick. We must find him."

"Very well, Dorothy."

WE FOUND the East Indian and the taxi driver in the dismantled living-room, but no sign of the wounded man. Dorothy repeated her story and then pointed to the broken table.

"That's what he leaned on just before he fell," she said. "He must be somewhere near."

The East Indian raised an authoritative hand. "It's useless to search here," he said. "Where is your telephone, Mr. Dawson? I must use it."

There was something so compelling in the man that neither Dorothy nor I stopped to question him. No, we simply led him to the telephone and stood aside while he rang up the sleepy operator. At last he got his number.

"Is this Mr. Clavering's apartment?"

A brief silence.

"Is your master there? You had better go and see."

A longer silence.

Then for the first time in my experience I saw the East Indian's face quiver with emotion. He bent forward and spoke hurriedly into the receiver.

"Ah, yes, yes. Calm yourself. Mr. Dawson and I will be there within a half-hour."

He hung up the receiver and turned toward me. "It is as I thought," he murmured. "We would be wasting time by searching here. He is at Riverside Drive."

"Take us to him!" Dorothy cried. "We must find him."

"I will take you to him," the East Indian answered solemnly. "But I must warn you—the gentleman you seek is dying."

SUNLIGHT was flooding the city when we reached our destination. To my amazement, I saw my car standing beside the curb as though it had never moved from the spot where I had left it the evening before.

A white-faced, disheveled Tom opened the door for us. Tears stood in his round eyes and he rubbed them away with his coat sleeve.

"Isn't it awful, Mr. Dawson!" he whispered.

We found my old friend lying on the divan like an overturned sack of meal. The shades were drawn; everything in the room was vague, shadowy, unreal.

The East Indian took both our hands in his and led us forward till we stood immediately above Clavering's bulky figure. Then, for the first time, I saw the dark ribbon of blood creeping down his neck.

And now Walter recognized me. His livid lips trembled into a smile.

"Dick," he murmured, "please pardon me this last heroic gesture. Dick, old man, I'm all in."

Then the dying man gave my wife an imploring glance. A few faltering words drifted up to me as though from a great distance:

"Even now she does not understand."

"Look at him well," the East Indian cried authoritatively. "Look at him well, and you will see the face of the real Walter Clavering."

My eyes, which had wandered to Dorothy, now returned to the dying man. It may have been the play of light and shadow, or perhaps the transfiguring touch of death itself; but certain it is that at this moment I saw something which caused me to utter a stifled cry.

The face of my old friend, that familiar face with its twitching nose and protruding eyes, had suddenly become a strange, seething mass which, as I gazed at it in horror and wonderment, began to rise up in some places and fall away in others like so much boiling dough. And now another face seemed to take shape out of it—a face, handsome and commanding, with brilliant eyes and determined lips—the face of that other Walter Clavering, the hero, the lover, the romanticist.

For an instant it smiled up at us as proudly as the death-mask of a famous warrior, and I staggered back and put my hands before my eyes. But when I looked again, it had melted away like a chimera and I saw only my old friend's flabby cheeks and glassy eyes. Walter Clavering was dead.

Jasper Pope

By J. AINSWORTH MORGAN

I THOUGHT I should go mad! Since early morning I had been obsessed with one thought, with the thought of Jasper Pope. Often had I heard of someone's thinking, suddenly, of a great friend of whom he had not thought for months; of that thought becoming so alarming as to cause him great concern over the possible safety and health of his friend. But this had never happened to me and never had I realized how alarming such a thing could become.

No sooner would I try to occupy myself with other thoughts than Jasper — Jasper — Jasper, rushed back to my mind like the oncoming of a sudden fever. Not only was I alarmed at myself, but I was alarmed concerning Jasper. I thought he must surely be attempting to notify me, to call me to him. Until this moment I had never believed in spiritualism or transmission of thought but now I began to wonder. I almost made myself believe that there was some truth in that science which I had hitherto termed fantastic rot.

I HAD known Jasper Pope all my life. He was a tall, thin chap with very blond, curly hair, a loose lock of which always hung over his right eye and he was in the habit of throwing his head back in a vain attempt to return it to its proper place. His eyes were of a very light blue and more watery than most men's eyes; they would look at you and if he didn't blink immediately they would seem to fill with tears and you wondered if he was about to weep. Then, suddenly he would blink and the tears would become absorbed and he would smile—the smile of a jubilant child—displaying his faultless white teeth and a slight dimple either side of his thin, tightly drawn lips.

His hands were those of an artist with long, tapering fingers and covered with a bluish gray, almost transparent, skin. They were nervous hands, always tinkering with the brim of his hat or twisting the buttons on his coat or fumbling for a cigarette and then lighting it only to cast it away after taking two or three jerky puffs.

IT ALL happened on a Sunday last May. I know it was a Sunday because I was on my way to St. Thomas's on Fifth Avenue when, suddenly, for no rhyme or reason, Jasper Pope came into my mind. I wondered why I had not thought of him for such a long time; it must have been a year or more.

I wondered what had become of him; if he was still about New York. It seemed strange that I had not run into him or that he had not looked me up. As I walked down the Avenue my thoughts became more and more engrossed in him.

I entered St. Thomas's thinking that the service would surely divert me. But the singing at once brought back Jasper; he used to have a lovely voice; yes, I almost imagined I heard his voice above mine. I looked

about nervously, fully expecting to find him sitting directly behind me or to one side or the other. I had that creepy sensation of someone's presence; someone who you know is near and yet whom you cannot see.

I stood it as long as I was able and then I picked up my hat and made my exit just as the sermon was starting. I am sure people thought me ill. I could feel that many eyes were watching me and this added greatly to my discomfort. My passage down the aisle seemed interminable—I was dragging feet of lead and becoming more conscious of my nervous behavior at each step.

On reaching the open air I took a deep breath, which helped to revive and strengthen me. On the other hand, I was still quite unstrung. Something had to be done. By this time I was fully convinced that Jasper needed me—that something terrible had happened to him. I decided to phone his house and, perhaps, be told the worst.

I went into the Gotham. Instinctively I started looking up his name in the directory but before I had arrived at the P's his phone number came to my mind. I was rather surprised at myself for having remembered it so long. I looked it up, nevertheless, just to assure myself that I was correct and that my memory was actually better than I had thought. The butler answered the phone. It was old Squires. I remembered his voice.

"Hello, is that you, Squires?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; who is it, please?" replied Squires.

"Is young Mr. Jasper at home, Squires?" I continued without telling him who I was.

"Mr. Jasper, sir? Why—er—er—no, sir. 'E's away now over a year. Who's callin', please?"

"Oh! Away, is he? Well—er—when do you expect him home, Squires?"

"Ah! That's 'ard tellin', sir. It all depends. But who's callin', may I ask, sir?"

"Can't you kindly tell me where he is, Squires? I feel I must get hold of him."

"No, sir, it wouldn't do no good. But who is this, sir?" Squires was becoming angry. I felt myself getting panicky.

"Oh! It wouldn't do any good, eh?" I said stupidly, and then I hung up without telling Squires who was calling.

IT WAS strange of me to do that. I had hung up before I realized that Squires had a perfect right to know who was calling.

I was going to phone him again, but for some reason a sensation almost akin to sickness came over me; I suppose it was the stuffiness of the booth. So I went on my way, more upset than ever.

Why had Squires been so vague and mysterious? Possibly Jasper had been off on another tear and his father had turned him out to make his own way in the world. He had repeatedly gone off on tears and his father had as many times threatened to disown him; this I remembered well—I could remember having worried for him. I could remember his father's having talked to me almost as though I had been to blame for his dissipation.

I was almost beside myself by this time and my main desire now was to do anything to get Jasper out of my mind. I thought first of going to a picture show, but after having walked hurriedly, almost as though I was running for a train, I arrived at the Plaza Cinema only to find that it had not opened yet.

I noticed that the picture that was to be shown here was entitled "Wild

Youth" and that again brought back Jasper. I shuddered, for some reason, and was glad that it wasn't open.

Then I thought of the Metropolitan Museum. That surely would be open, so I jumped into a taxi and asked the driver to hurry. He did, but I suppose he wondered why he should hurry to a place like that.

I HAD never seen the new Egyptian exhibition, so I found my way there without delay. As Fate would have it, the first cabinet I looked into showed a collection of scarabs and in the center was a green one, almost the facsimile of one Jasper used to wear in a ring on his little finger.

I remembered how he had lost it in a fight. It was long ago, but I must have been there because I remembered every detail of it. I turned away from the cabinet wondering if it might actually be his.

This incident served to un-nerve me more than ever. Everything I saw brought Jasper back to my mind and I was gradually but surely, as I thought, going mad.

When I came to a large alabaster sarcophagus which contained a mummy, it was the last straw—the mummy was the living image of Jasper. Perhaps I was so unstrung that I thought this, but nevertheless it startled me so that I couldn't remain any longer. I left the Museum as hurriedly as I had arrived.

FOR the next half-hour I must have been in sort of a trance, because when I came to myself again I was down by the —— Hotel. I had walked, mechanically, the pavement guiding my steps, my thoughts wrapped up in Jasper.

All of a sudden I remembered something. The last time I had seen him he was engaged—engaged to pretty little Phyllis Sutherland.

I, too, had been more than ordinarily fond of Phyllis, but, for some reason, I couldn't imagine why it had been so. I hadn't seen or heard of her for a year or more. She, if anyone, would certainly know of Jasper's whereabouts.

I decided to phone her and clear up a mystery that was driving me insane. I went into the ——. Again I was pleased with myself for remembering her number also.

I was a bundle of nerves when a voice answered, because, aside from my own worries, I didn't know what excuse I was going to give for not having phoned her all those months. Phyllis had been more than ordinarily fond of me and I thought what a fool I had been to neglect her so long.

"Is Miss Sutherland there?" I asked abruptly.

"Just a moment, please, I'll call her."

It was her mother. I remembered her pretty English voice, but I didn't say who I was—she hadn't asked me. I waited a moment and then I could hear the guttural sound of someone taking up the receiver.

"Miss Sutherland speaking!" It was Phyllis.

"Hello, Phyllis dear—er—this is—er—an old friend of yours—er—an old friend. But before I tell you who it is—er—who it is—I want to ask you if you know where I can get in touch with—er—Jasper Pope. I——"

"Jasper? Jasper? Why — er — he —er—Oh! don't you know? He—er —Who is this speaking? Who are you?"

She fairly shrieked through the phone. Her voice startled me to such an extent that my mind became a complete blank. I couldn't think of my own name. I felt like an idiot. I didn't know what to say; I just stammered incoherently:

"I want to get hold of Jasper—Jasper Pope. What has happened to him? Where——?"

At that Phyllis burst into tears and hung up the receiver. I found myself in a cold sweat.

What was it all about? What frightful thing had happened to Jasper that no one dared mention? What was happening to me? Why should it affect me to the extent of forgetting my own name like a complete jackass?

I left the booth mopping my brow with a handkerchief. I felt weak, almost sick again, so I sat down in a chair in the Lobby and tried to collect my wits and decide what action to take.

I wondered whether or not to go right up to Phyllis but finally decided that would not be the best thing to do. Better to find out something definite, if possible, and be prepared. There was not a doubt in my mind, now, that something tragic had occurred and it was for this reason that poor Jasper had been haunting me. If he could only have known how desperate he was making me I am sure he would have stopped.

I SUPPOSE I must have sat in the Lobby a full half-hour — smoking; mopping my brow over and over again; trying to fathom it all out; watching the people pass by with the hope of seeing a familiar face, someone who had known Jasper and whom I knew.

At last I spotted a person whose face I recognized. I couldn't remember his name, but I knew him. He was in uniform, probably someone Jasper and I had known in the Navy during the war.

At all events I was certain that he knew Jasper, so I left my chair and started toward him. He was busy in conversation with the room clerk and two or three bell-boys were listening intently.

I went right up to him and interrupted his conversation. He turned, startled, when he heard my voice. The clerk looked at me. The bell-boys looked at me. Before my friend could say anything I blurted out:

"Tell me—er—I forget your name—but do you know where I can find Jasper Pope?"

The clerk and the bell-boys all started talking at once and my friend in the uniform, grasping me firmly by the hand, told them to keep quiet—to say nothing and then, very calmly, he answered my question:

"YES, young man, I know where Jasper Pope is. I'll take you to him. Come with me!"

My friend in the uniform led me across the Lobby to what I thought was a doorway into another room. A crowd gathered about us. As I came before what I thought was a doorway, there was Jasper Pope with a man in uniform holding him by the arm. His loose lock of very blond hair hung over his right eye. His watery blue eyes startled me, they looked so frightened and wild.

Quickly I extended my hand to shake his. Simultaneously Jasper extended his hand. Then, to my horror, my hand struck a mirror!

That is all I remember because they say I fainted and my keeper (the man in the uniform) returned me to the asylum. However, since that day I have been quite normal.

The shock cured me—cured me of that first shock from which I had, for over a year, suffered. It was in a street fight—the night I lost my green scarab—but that's another story.

The Witch

By BEN LUCIEN BURMAN

WITH A LUST for adventure in his heart and $150 in the tobacco sack serving him as purse, Jem Olin, gigantic deckhand of the river steamer *Lady Estill,* stalked mountainously between the rows of hovels fringing the muddy roadway. Now he stopped to peer into a shabby café where shabby men sat drinking from tall, cracked glasses; now he halted before a swinging door from behind which came soft oaths and the muffled click-click of colliding pool balls.

Constantly, in deference to the sinister renown of the hamlet whose single street he was traversing, his fingers rested in a trousers pocket sheltering a revolver. For Cottonmouth Island, torn from the mainland in a moment of flood, lay mouldering on the clayey bosom of the Father of Waters between the borders of Louisiana and Mississippi, a No Man's Land claimed by both states and governed by neither; a heaven for gamblers, thieves and desperadoes; a hell for saints; a grim Saragossa Sea of human vagabondage.

The deckhand's body swung massively as he felt a touch on his shoulder. Behind him stood a genial-appearing individual h o l d i n g a corn-cob pipe.

"Got a light, pardner?" sputtered the stranger amiably.

Olin nodded and drew out a smudged box of matches.

"Riverman, ain't yuh?" mumbled the other, appling flame to the pipe.

"Yep."

"Thought so. Tell 'em every time. So'm I. First time yuh're here, ain't it?"

"Yep."

"Thought that, too. Been here a lot myself." The box of matches returned to its owner. "Take some advice, brother. Keep yer eyes open when yuh're here. Bad place. Bad place. Look out fur that there one in pertickler." He pointed to a sign gloomily proclaiming that at Bill's Café room and board could be obtained for "One Doller Up."

"Gypsy runs it. Him an' his wife an' gal. They'll git every cent yuh got. Everybody on this here island owes 'em money, an' when they don't pay the gypsies puts the evil eye on 'em. They says they're witches. Lynch 'em one of these days I guess. S'long. Thanks fur the light."

Witches! The word t o u c h e d Olin with sharp unpleasantness as he watched the garrulous pedestrian disappear in the direction of the gray dance hall. Witches. Conjurers in league with the devil.

Had he not learned in his superstitious mountain cabin how two black crows cawing on the doorstep were in reality two sorcerers plotting death for one of the helpless occupants? Had he not himself beheld a negro voodoo magician with eleven fingers bring back to life a child two hours a corpse? Yes, they were fearful, these necromancers. But fascinating.

HE GLANCED at the swaying sign before the café, swung his legs a few

long paces toward it, halted, then strode on unflinchingly, his courage overmastering his reluctance. He thought he could perceive a figure lurking near the door which half-masked the shadowy interior.

His eyes intent upon it, he failed to notice a puddle of water directly in his path, with the consequence that his shoe splashed into the liquid and he fell awkwardly into the road. Arising, he growled a curse, and was withdrawing his leg from the mire when a low musical laugh caused him to wheel savagely.

Framed behind the glass of the café windows he saw the lithe, graceful form of a girl garbed in a gown of black silk, brilliantly hidden at the shoulders and waist by stripes of orange and crimson, the folds of a dazzling Spanish mantilla. Her l u s t r o u s black eyes twinkled with merriment. On perceiving she was observed, her laughter ceased; yet she could not repress a smile.

The smile was delicately contagious. Wrath deserted the mountaineer's cheeks. "Took a kinda bad spill, didn't I?" he mumbled sheepishly, as he squeezed the water from his gaudy-checked trousers. Again the girl smiled. He stared, in frank naive admiration. She moved her head, and bangles clinked beneath the soft ivory of her dainty ears. The sound was melodious, but it caused the mountaineer to quiver.

THIS was the gypsy, the witch. The traditions of his pine-girded home surged into his consciousness. He began to trudge off. He came to a stop, arrested by the sound of her voice, a voice crooning, languorous, bizarre.

"Weel you not come inside? I weel get for you ze brush. To knock from you ze mud. Like zees. *Vaya!*" With a ringed finger she flicked imaginary particles of clay from her gown.

The deckhand shifted hesitantly. Never before had such an enchanting voice rippled in his ears; never before had such a smile entranced his wondering eyes. To him the feminine was mystery.

In the mountain fastnesses he had just abandoned there had been only the gaunt sister who tramped with him behind the plow, and the raw-boned daughters of a forest neighbor. The beauty of the girl radiant in the doorway struck him with the violence of a revelation.

"Thank yuh," he drawled. "I'll come in fur a minute."

A withered gypsy with a face hard and angular as the metal ornaments piercing his ears shambled from behind a tumbledown bar. Distrustfully the mountaineer surveyed him, then ordered whisky. He drank and set about brushing the caking mud from his coat. The girl took a seat at a rickety table. He drained a second glass, a third, and joined her.

"Where do yuh come from?" he inquired gently.

"Madrid. In Espagne. Spain. Ees it not so?" A note of regret touched her brief, warbled sentences. "It ees ver' b e a u t i f u l, E s p a g n e. You have been zere, *amigo?*"

He shook his head, flattered at the question. His body moved restlessly on his chair. "Yuh're a mighty pretty gal," he declared abruptly.

The crimson shadow of a blush faintly tinged her cheeks. Vivaciously she denied the compliment. They continued to converse, she in a fantastic but charming melange of English and Spanish, he in halting mountain monosyllables.

THE DIALOGUE suddenly terminated as a burly, overalled far-

mer tramped through the door of the café and, stamping across the linoleum to the table at which the girl was sitting, threw at her feet the body of a white, silken-haired goat.

"There's what yuh done," the newcomer snarled. "Now pay fur it."

Quickly the gypsy arose, bewilderedly confronting the intruder. The mantilla lifted and fell in a drifting wave of orange and scarlet as she shrugged her graceful shoulders. "No *comprendo*," she murmured. "I not understan'."

The rustic shook his fists. "Yuh don't want to understand. Yuh know what yuh done, yuh evil-eye gypsy witch. I guess I didn't see yuh lookin' over my fence this mornin', puttin' a curse on my goat so he died a hour later.

"I guess Todd Hawkins didn't see yuh do it a couple of weeks ago just afore all his sheep was pisened.

"I guess yuh think this town's asleep maybe. I guess yuh think that 'cause people owes yer father money 'count of a little dice or card game he kin do what he wants to 'em when they don't pay up the first minute.

"But he can't no more, by God. No more. It's goin' to stop. There's been plenty of niggers lynched here an' a couple of white men an' I guess there ain't going to be much cryin' fur missin' a few heathen gypsies. Yuh're goin' to pay me fur that goat an' yuh're goin' to pay me good, too. Not a cent less'n a hundred dollars."

Two brawny figures on guard outside growled approval. Beyond them, in the roadway, a muttering crowd was gathering.

Again the mantilla lifted and fell in crimson brilliance. "Yes. I have look at your goat zis morning. And why? Because I weesh to kill him? But surely no. Because in my own country I have myself ze goat. Zat is why I have look. I love zem ver' much. I ver', ver' sad because he have die."

The rustic grunted his derision and, retreating to the doorway, whispered malignantly to the two mute centurions at the threshold. When he faced within, his hands held a mule whip. "Yuh won't pay, so I'll take it out of yer hide. A hundred dollars. A dollar a lick."

Sullenly, menacingly, he advanced, the whip quivering in his passionate fingers.

"Git back," boomed the mountaineer, rising gigantically and towering over the table. "This ain't yer day fur horsewhippin'."

"She's got to pay me fur my goat. I ain't goin' to stand——"

"Git," interrupted Olin simply.

The intruder scrutinized his herculean antagonist and began a retreat. "We'll fix yer yet. Yuh'll see. Yuh'll see." With his sentinels he shuffled into the bogs of the street. The rabble dispersed in clamorous disappointment.

THE GIRL slumped wearily to her seat at the table. The mountaineer extracted some tobacco leaves from a discolored paper sack and chewed meditatively. "Yuh ain't a—a—witch, are yuh?"

"Zere are no witches."

"Oh, yes, there is. I seen 'em myself. Two of 'em. A old cripple lady what was a witch put a spell on me oncet when I was a baby. I was pretty near dyin' when my mammy tore open the pillow of my bed. An' right in the middle was a wreath of feathers, the death wreath the witch had put there. My mammy throwed it in the fire an' I got well the minute it was ashes.

"There was another old lady witch whose cabin got hit by lightnin' one night, an' when we looked fur her body in the mornin' we

couldn't find nuthin' but a burned picture of the Devil. Oh, yes, there's witches. But yuh ain't one, are yuh?"

Bangles tinkled as the gypsy shook her head in gentle negation.

"I'm glad. Glad." The deckhand cast a wistful glance at the bar. "Will yuh git me another drink?"

"It ees not good to dreenk too much of my father's whisky."

"Oh, I guess it ain't goin' to hurt me none. Git me one, will yuh?"

She set the sparkling glass before him. The gypsy proprietor, who had disappeared upon the entrance of the infuriated farmer, now showed his cadaverous head around a partition at the rear. His finger beckoned commandingly.

"I mus' go," the girl murmured. "You weel come again to see me? Yes?"

"Sure." The deckhand's lips were taut. "Even—even if yuh was a witch."

A sudden smile arched his hearer's tiny mouth. "You are a ver' foolish man. But a ver' good man." She stooped and, imprinting a quick kiss on the astounded riverman's forehead, vanished like an apparition.

Olin heard the noise of an altercation behind the partition. The shriveled master of the inn limped forward and invited him to drink. He drained the glass.

HE AWOKE to find himself lying fully dressed on a musty featherbed, with a blurred, hypnotic recollection of innumerable potions of whisky and interminable throws of grimy dice. Mechanically he sat up and thrust his hands into his pockets. They were empty.

His numbed intellect was trying to deduce some explanation for this startling discovery, when a muffled tapping began on the wall, a tapping which he drowsily recognized as the sound which had roused him from his cataleptic slumber.

Torpidly he arose, and by the misty light which drifted through what appeared to be an attic window found a door and pulled it open. Even in the cloudy obscurity his eyes could distinguish the orange and crimson stripes of a voluminous mantilla.

He started and was about to utter an exclamation. The girl's fingers touched him warningly.

"Say notheeng, amigo," she whispered. "My father, my mother mus' not hear. Zey ver' angry if zey know what I do. My father have cheat you with ze dice. He always cheat, my father. With the others my mouth is silent. But with you—I have bring it back." She thrust a roll of bills into his hands.

The foggy murkiness v i s i b l e through the window was abruptly shot with red. Gazing dreamily beyond the glass, Olin could discern the lower half of the island in opaque b l a c k n e s s dotted by a myriad points of d a n c i n g fire. "What's goin' on down yonder? Looks like torches."

"*Que?* I do not know." She seized his limp arm. "Come. Quick."

HE FOLLOWED her down a flight of decrepit stairs. A broken box jutted from a corner. He tripped upon it, cursed sleepily. The noise brought the inn-keeper, with his face of a death-mask, darting out from the deserted café.

His jeweled fingers holding a candle, he blocked any further advance, hurling guttural volleys of reproach at his daughter. His wife waddled to his side, her termagant's voice joining shrilly in the denunciation.

A vibrant thudding, as of many feet trampling sodden ground, and ominous roar thundering up the

island silenced the revilers. The inn-keeper shuffled into the bar-room.

He returned gasping, his skin a shrunken gray. Mumbling feverishly to his wife, he clanged the shutters of a window which opened upon a yard, and double-locked the rotten door.

"My father theenk they come to kill us," the girl announced gravely to her companion.

"Huh?" Excitement was dispelling Olin's drowsiness. "Gimme my pistol what yuh stole," he grunted to the inn-keeper. The gypsy obeyed.

The heavy thud of boots trampling clay grew louder, shook the flimsy walls, and ceased. A roar ascended from unseen, savage throats. "Kill 'em! Hang the witches!"

"Stay here. With yer mammy an' pappy," rumbled the deckhand to the daughter. Stalking into the café, he flung open the door and blinked into the flames of the torches which tipped as with blood the white and black-faced derelicts of derelict Cottonmouth Island.

"We don't want yuh," shouted the leader of the rabble, who proved to be the avenging rustic of the afternoon. "We want the gypsies. The witches."

"There ain't no witches here."

The mob jeered and bellowed. The commander twirled a serpentine noose dangling from his arm.

"Yuh don't know what's goin' on in this town, stranger," he muttered, "or yuh wouldn't be doin' what yuh're doin'. Yuh heard me sayin' this afternoon what they done to me an' pretty near everybody else on this island. Well, that wasn't enough.

"Just a couple of hours ago they killed pore old Jeptha Perry 'cause he owed 'em fifty dollars. We know they done it 'cause he said he seen the gal's spirit standin' by his bed, pullin' him down to the foot to make him die. An' he did die, fifteen minutes later. Yuh see now? Yuh think we're goin' to stand fur things like that? Git out of the way."

"Don't talk to 'im!" blustered a swaggering ruffian. "Knock 'im on the head an' go past 'im!"

The mountaineer stared impassively. "Try it."

A restive silence fell upon the circle of attackers. A torch splintered through the window of the café. The smudged cotton curtains behind it blazed. Darting within, the riverman bolted the door behind him and gripped the girl's tense arm.

"There ain't no chance to fight 'em," he pronounced stoically. "Yuh all 'll have to git."

He lumbered with her toward the far end of the building as the street door began to crack explosively under the blows of hammering fists. They stepped into the yard, whose bricks were pulsating with gorgeous vermilion as the walls caught the contagion of the flaming gauze.

The gypsy wrung her hands. "My parents. Zey will die. Zey search for zere moneys. Wait."

"Yuh can't wait. People are comin' round on this side already."

She tried to escape him and force her way back into the seething interior. He lifted her in his enormous arms and sped through a gateway. A bound carried him to the bushy willows fringing the river bank. He hurtled down the slope. Two figures outlined in shadowy crimson dashed in pursuit.

He sighted a rowboat moored to a stake. Dropping his slender burden in the stern, he leaped to a seat between the thwarts and began to row desperately. The pusuers, howling maledictions, deserted the shore when tortured screams and a

roar of bestial exultation floated up from the glowing cauldron of the inn. The oars clicked monotonously in the whining locks. The girl wept soundlessly.

"It ain't no use," whispered the oarsman. "They had their chancet to git away. An' they didn't take it."

THE PROW of the boat touched the mainland. Far over the water the riverman watched tiny red silhouettes suspend a tiny noose from a pygmy tree. A wave of superstitious fear swept over him. "I told 'em yer mammy an' pappy wasn't witches. They wasn't, was they? Leastways, you ain't, are yuh?"

"Take me back and let 'em 'ang me also. It weel be better. I weel go."

"Nope."

A skiff scudded from the island, reawakening him to a sense of peril. He scrambled onto the bank and led the way along the edge of a canebrake until the soaring smokestacks of the steamer *Lady Estill* barred with black the star-lit sky. He tramped aboard and related his story to the night-gowned captain.

"They said she was a witch, huh?" grumbled the skipper, not unkindly. "Dumb fools. Anybody knows there ain't no witches." He scrutinized the deckhand shrewdly. "Why are you so interested in a gal all of a sudden? Goin' to marry her?"

"Uh! Hadn't thought nuthin' 'bout it. Uh! Yep, I guess so."

"All right. She kin stay. Put her in one of the guest cabins. My wife ain't got no sense an' 'll kick about havin' a gypsy on board, an' the niggers'll raise hell. But go ahead."

In the morning a minister marched onto the deck to pronounce the marriage ceremony over a brightly garlanded bride and a purple-clad groom amid the cheers of a grinning crew.

Three mornings after, when news of the island tragedy had drifted up the river, the skipper summoned the deckhand to the pilot house.

"I'll have to go back on my word, Jem," he announced reluctantly. "My wife's a bigger fool than I thought she was, an' the niggers say they'll all leave if your wife stays. They're sayin' she put the evil eye on two of 'em already."

"She ain't a—a—witch, capt'n."

"'Course she ain't a witch. But my repairs 'll be done here tomorrow an' I'll be sailin'. An' I can't sail without no sailors. I'm sorry."

With his knife the mountaineer cut a thin square from a plug of tobacco and gloomily spat over the rail. "All right. I'll git tonight."

WHEN the daylight yellow of the river had changed to its evening ebony, two figures moved drearily down the plank leading from the *Lady Estill* to the shore. The mountaineer shifted the pack upon his back and for a moment gazed stonily, vacantly into the murmuring water. Then he spoke, in a voice of limpid tenderness. "Where yuh want to go, Marija?"

The mantilla crushed caressingly against his arm. "You are my 'usband, *mio caro*. Where you go, zere will I follow."

"Yep. I been thinkin' all day. There's a little town on a creek up the river, 'bout fifty miles, I guess. Seen it comin' down in the boat. Purty place. Mighty purty. The people fishes fur mussel pearls. We kin buy a shanty an' start fishin', too. Git rich, maybe. Yuh want to do it?"

"You are my 'usband, *mio caro*."

They trudged off into the darkness.

THREE days and three nights brought them to the hamlet of Caney Creek, where, like a smoking planet, a bleak, belching factory stood encircled by satellites of squalid huts on the shore, and a crescent of decrepit shanty boats floating on the water.

"That there's the button works," drawled Olin, pointing a great finger. "They buys the mussel shells after yuh git the pearls out, an' makes buttons frum it. We can't help but make a lot of money."

Marija nodded pensively. "Yes, *mio caro*. But would it not be better go far, far up ze river? Weel not zeze people some day find out what has 'appen down zere an'—an'——"

"An' want to hang yuh?" he interrupted bluntly. "They won't find out nuthin'. An' if they did—jest let 'em try to touch you."

Speedily he struck a bargain with a native for one of the shanty boats bobbing uncouthly in the swells, and for two months lived a life of idyllic content.

Each day he gathered bucketful upon bucketful of the gritty molluscs, searched for the pearls, then trundled the shining shell off to the factory. But after a week of tempests a summer flood came pouring down the green valley, and when its waters subsided the mussels, as if by some evil magic, had vanished.

Every morning, every afternoon, he laboriously set out in his yawl, and always returned with the buckets in the stern empty. The money he had saved on shipboard was soon exhausted.

The natural kindliness of his nature warped under adversity. He grew sullen, morose; would sit for hours gazing desolately over the side of his drab habitation brooding over his calamities. And as he brooded the superstitious fear which happiness had pressed into the background again mastered his consciousness.

It was a punishment. He had disobeyed the inexorable commandments of his forefathers. He had married one not of his own blood and race. He has chosen for wife a gypsy. A witch.

TO AVOID her presence he began frequenting the shabby village café, transforming the few pennies he received for chores into glasses of cheap whisky.

Ugly rumors reached his ears. He gave no heed, until on returning unexpectedly one afternoon he beheld Marija emerging from the shanty in a dress of gypsy brilliance, her ears a-tinkle with flashing bangles, her shoulders hidden by the vivid mantilla.

"What yuh doin' wearin' gypsy clothes?" he grunted. "Yuh know yuh said you'd never put 'em on again in yer life. Yuh been up to yer old witch tricks, ain't yuh? I been hearin' things, but I didn't believe 'em. Yuh want to git hanged like yer mammy an' pappy?"

She bowed her head in gentle humility. "I mus' live, Meester Jem. You give to me notheeng, notheeng. I can no buy ze bread for you an' for me with no moneys. I do no wrong. Only I tell ze fortune with ze cards. Zat ees all."

His eyes grew k i n d e r. "You oughtn't wear them gypsy clothes, Marija. You oughtn't do it. Seems kind of against the Lord."

Half an hour later he was on his way to the café again. When he returned, he was staggering. The drunkenness became a habit, a habit which soon made life unbearable for his gentle-mannered wife.

ON AN evening marking the end of a particularly inflammatory debauch, the mountaineer threw open

the door of his hut and stumbled into the candle-lit interior.

He saw Marija rise from her chair to greet him; saw that she was clad once more in her flaming gypsy garments. He began to upbraid her dourly and, moving toward her, fiercely gripped her arm.

She gazed at him sadly, for a long time hesitated, murmured to herself, then with sudden decision withdrew a carven amulet from the folds of her skirt. He stared at it, fascinated.

"It ees enough, Meester Jem," she murmured, letting the charm lie exposed in her palm. "I have say to you before you are good man, but ver' foolish man. It ees not you who so bad treat me. No. It ees ziz bad whisky which make you crazy. An' I, Marija, weel make it to end. *Cuidado!* You see ziz little jewel? Zere are in it three hairs of your 'ead. Over zeze I weel say words, ze magic gypsy words, an' if you do not stop ze drink, zere weel a spell, a terrible spell come upon you. I do ziz because I love you, *mio caro.*"

He gripped her arm tighter. "Yuh cain't put a spell on me. Yuh ain't a witch. Yuh told me so yerself. Yuh're jest a-tryin' to skeer me."

"I do not scare. You will see. You will see. You hurt my arm, *mio caro.* Ver' much you hurt it. Let me go."

The sharp entreaty in her words touched his dazed sensibilities. His grip relaxed, his face softened with tenderness.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, Marija. I love you better than anything livin' in the world. But don't you go doin' none of them witch tricks. They drive me crazy. Clean crazy." He kissed her cheek. "Yuh was a fool fur marryin' me. I'm a good-fur-nuthin'. Just a good-fur-nuthin'."

For three days his visits to the café ceased. On the fourth day his resolves faltered; the visits recommenced.

HARVEST week arrived, bringing with it opportunity for more clinking pennies and more murky whisky.

Saturday night he plodded to his wonted post at the bar. The other patrons moved off in obvious uneasiness. Olin glared and drank. The village mule dealer arose from a group at a card-strewn table and stalked to the solitary tipper.

"She'll have to git, brother," the merchant asserted impressively.

"Huh? Who'll have to git?"

"Yer wife. I don't want to see no lynchin' of a woman here the way there was down at Cottonmouth. Not even a witch."

The mountaineer growlingly set down his glass. "There ain't no witches."

"Ain't there? Well, we in this town thinks different. We knows different. All gypsies is witches. Who brought the flood an' spoiled all the mussels an' made times hard fur everybody if she didn't? Ab Jackson's lived here pretty near a hunderd years an' he says nuthin' like it ever happened before. I been puzzlin' out that it looked like a hoodoo fur a long time myself, an' when we heard about Cottonmouth this afternoon I didn't need to puzzle no longer. No, brother, be kind of wise an' take her away, while you can take her away."

"Who told yuh 'bout Cottonmouth?"

A garish dandy advanced smirking from the corner. "Jake C. Harris, representin' Wilson an' Bell. The finest line of groceries an' dry goods south of Memphis," he chattered flippantly. "I seen the gypsy today just a few hours after I come to town, an' recognized her in a minute. You can't fool Jake C. Say, what do you think you're doin'?

What do you think——" His body thudded against the moist sawdust of the floor.

"Teach yuh not to talk so much maybe," grunted Olin. "An' I won't git fur yuh nor nobody else," he added somberly to the trader of mules.

Greedily he drank the liquor until his pockets were stripped; then, stumbling to his ghostly shanty, reviled his wife with a violence surpassing all his previous attacks, and dropped inertly into bed.

HE AWOKE with a stabbing in his temples which caused him to bolt upward and sit rocking in dizzy agony. He clapped his hands to his head, moaned, then bent forward, and shook the fragile body of the girl stretched out upon the sheets. "Somethin's happenin' to my head. Is it the spell yuh said yuh was goin' to put on me? Is it? Answer me! Answer me, I tell yuh! If yuh done it I'll kill yuh, yuh witch."

Marija's eyes opened drowsily. She was about to make a dreamy, uncomprehending reply, when the agony manifest in her husband's countenance abruptly vanished and his head slumped back to the pillow. He slept.

Three days passed. The pains in the mountaineer's temples recurred with increasing rigor. He shuffled about the hovel in a grim, savage daze, staring at his wife, who remained c o n s t a n t l y within the shanty's borders, afraid to venture in the hamlet which she had been warned was smoldering against her.

The necessity of food drove her at length to the village grocery. Receiving her meagre packages of flour and potatoes from the scowling clerk, she hurried down the road toward the shore.

A swarm of tattered children were playing marbles on the clay. They sighted her and, secure in numbers, set up a lusty jeering. The bolder hurled rocks. Marija strode on faster. Loungers in front of the window of a poolroom sauntered over to re-enforce the youths with their maturer taunting. They, too, hurled a volley of stones.

Marija darted toward the boat, the village ruffians in bellowing pursuit. She reached the door of the shanty, flung it open, and gained the interior.

The mountaineer rose from a gnarled chair. "What's the matter with yuh?" he grumbled.

The gypsy pointed outside. The husband looked and saw gesticulating figures collecting on the bank. He lifted a rifle from a hook on the wall and stalked to the entrance. A clamorous outcry greeted his appearance. "Give us the witch!"

His finger at the trigger, he confronted the mob in gloomy defiance. "There ain't no witches here. An' if there was, I wouldn't let yuh have her, yuh low-down pack of cowards."

He remained thus, a towering threat, until the yellow bank was deserted; then striding i n s i d e, he placed the rifle on the table within quick reach of his arm, and drew a bottle from his pocket. He drank deeply.

NIGHT fell. The stinging torment in his temples recommenced. He shuffled to the rail and, bending, dipped his head into the soothing river. Erect once more, he shook the water from him mistily. "If I knowed she done it I'd kill her," he muttered.

Again his mouth sought the shining bottle. A maddening fire blazed back of his forehead, seeming to sear and consume each fibre of his brain in its devouring fury. Cursing, he dug his fists into his eyes, as if the

pressure of his bony knuckles might drive the torture from his being. A moment later he was advancing toward Marija, his fists clenched, his face livid with rage.

The girl, cowering at the rickety stove, saw him halt a few paces from her and glare blankly ahead, while his hands flapped drunkenly to his faded trousers.

"What'd yuh blow out the candle fur?" he grunted. "Yuh think yuh kin hide from me, do yuh? I'll show yuh! Git a match an' light it. Quick."

Marija's eyes widened into black circles of astonishment. "I have not blow out ze candle, Meester Jem. Why ees it you say thees? Do you not see? It burns brightly, ver' brightly on the table."

"Don't yuh lie to me. Don't yuh dare to lie to me." He thrust out with his fists in the direction of the voice and struck a wall. "I'll git yuh fur that, yuh sneak. I'll teach yuh to try yer gypsy tricks. Light that candle afore I count ten or, by God, I'll beat yer pretty skin right off yuh. Yuh hear me?"

"I hear, *mio caro.* But you are seeck. You have drink too much. The candle burns. Wait. I weel show you." She brought his hand forward until a finger touched the flaming wick.

He jerked his hand away. "It's there, I guess. I kin feel it." He walked backward a few faltering steps and halted. "See if I kin find it myself," he growled and, drunkenly experimenting, stumbled forward until he once more felt the warmth of the blazing tallow. He shook his head, then thrust his fingers squarely into the dancing tongue of fire. There he held them while the heat scorched the calloused flesh. The hand dropped to the table. "I'm blind," he murmured. "Blind! Blind!"

His wife's gentle body crushed against his breast. He caught her wrists and tenderly pressed them to his sightless eyes. "Give 'em back to me, Marija. Give me back my eyes, won't yuh? I ain't drunk now. I been mighty mean to yuh, I know. I never give yuh no money. An' when I was crazy with whisky I treated yuh like a dog. Yes, an' all the time I loved yuh. I was a fool! A fool! Yuh was right to put a spell on me. But take it away now, Marija. I learned my lesson. I ain't drunk now. I won't never drink no more. Give me back my eyes. My eyes!"

The girl quivered with great, soundless sobs. "I cannot. Oh, I cannot, *mio caro.* I have make no spell upon you. I say zat only to make you stop ze dreenk. I have know what would 'appen. But you would not stop. Oh, Meester Jem! Meester Jem!"

"Give me back my eyes, Marija. Yuh took 'em away. Now, give 'em back.

"I cannot! I cannot! I weel pray."

SHE FELL to her knees. He seized her upraised hands and shook her stonily. "Yuh can't pray. Yuh know yuh're lyin' to me. Yuh told me yerself yuh was goin' to put a spell on me. An' if yuh kin put a spell yuh kin make it go away. A—a witch can't pray."

She writhed, trying to escape from his fierce, lacerating fingers. "I am not a weetch. Before God I tell you, *mio caro.* It ees ze bad whisky. Do you listen, *mio caro?* Ze poison whisky you have dreenk. Maybe it weel go away. Sometimes in my father's house have I see it go away. You pain my hands much —much. Let me go. I weel run to ze village to find ze doctor."

"Will yuh take away the spell—yuh witch?"

"I have tell you I have make no spell. I weel run to ze village to find ze doctor. No spell. You do not believe, my 'usband. No spell. An' I cannot take eet away. No."

"Then I'm goin' to kill yuh." He clutched her throat and thrust her from him in somber despair. "I can't. Not with my own hands. I've loved yuh too much. I'm a coward. A coward! But not with my own hands."

HE GROPED to the door, and after many fumbling attempts locked it behind him, then felt his way over the frail plank leading to shore, like a monstrous beetle creeping along a straw. He stumbled onto the slippery bank, tripped, and pitched mountainously into the mud, wounding his head on a jagged log. He staggered to his feet, and bruised, spattered, bleeding, lurched up the deserted road, now swaying round a hitching-post, now reeling giddily over the roots of a tree.

At last he floundered against an object which his searching finger-tips recognized as the signboard standing in front of the cafe. Rocking past it, he toppled into the barroom.

A smoky, agitated circle of faces formed about him. "My wife," he mumbled brokenly. "Yuh all was right. She's a witch. A witch! Made me blind, blind. Hang her." He collapsed against a table. The mule dealer caught his crumpling body.

A rope was brought; noiselessly the villagers fell into line behind the mountaineer. He took the arm of the cafe owner, and stumbled forward. The procession halted at the edge of the sighing water.

"Wait here," the blind man murmured, "I'll git her." He crawled to the shanty and groping for the keyhole, unlocked the door. "Where are yuh?" he called.

"I am 'ere, *mio caro.*" The girl's voice was gently resolute. "You have bring them to 'ang me?"

"I love yuh. But yuh're a witch. An' a witch has got to die."

"*Buenos.* It ees good so. Once you have save my life. It ees yours to take. I have 'ad no one but you. An' now I have not you. Yes, it ees good so. Ay! Ay!"

She enfolded him in her arms and drew down his head until it touched the downy whiteness of her face. He kissed her lips. Together they moved to the hut's entrance. A new spasm of pain darted through his pulsing brain. Again he cursed, again he dug his fists into the sockets of his dead but burning eyes. Then his fingers unclosed; he twisted his head from side to side in stolid perplexity.

"There's the candle sittin' there, ain't it? I kin see again. My eyes is back."

The temporary blindness induced by the alcohol had vanished under the vehemence of his exertions and emotions as quickly as it had come. He wavered, irresolute; a moment later he lumbered to the table. "It's a sign! It's a sign!"

HE LIFTED the rifle lying on the cloth and stalked toward the moonlit obscurity of the shanty's porch. A muttering arose from the watchers on shore as he stepped alone beyond the shadowed threshold.

"There ain't no witches here," he grunted. With his heavy boot he kicked at the board linking the shanty to the land. It splashed into the water. He seized the long pole fixed to the rail and pushed mightily against the bank. The swells lapped musically about the lazy bow. The boat drifted into the river.

The Secret of the Gods

By KATHARINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

Author of "Yellow Soap," etc.

THREE PART STORY—PART I

THIS three part story, by the author of "Yellow Soap" and other popular novels, will be found unusually interesting by readers who like stories of love and mystery, that are not only adroitly conceived but also cleverly written. Katharine Haviland Taylor always has an excellent story to tell and you will certainly not be disappointed in this one. We feel sure you will eagerly look forward to the succeeding installments of this story as the Secret of the Gods is unfolded to you.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOVING GODS

THE radical changes that are a part of some dramatically lived lives occasionally come swiftly; I have learned that! And well and bitterly! But, to tell the tale in short order—

I was one night dressing in my room in the house on Spruce Street, Philadelphia, in which I lived with my grandfather. We had dined alone and I had worn the frock in which I had played cards all that afternoon.

A very idle young thing I was at that hour with never a thought to the ways of getting bread and butter, let alone the jam which I expected! I had been sheltered and petted; my grandfather had guarded me almost fiercely; fearful I suppose, all the while, that I, too, would fall under the shadow which seemed to follow our family who were known, and justly, as "those tragic Belmonts."

However, none of the tragedies that had been was in my mind or heart. I hummed as I got ready for that night's festivity, and I remember turning before a long mirror and thinking that the back of my gold frock was even better than the front of it, and that my mother had been kind to bequeath to me her blazing yellow hair.

Then, in my working clothes—for that is what a party dress is, to a debutante—I decided I would go down to spend the last few minutes with my grandfather, Admiral Courtney Belmont; so I picked up my wrap, my fan and my bag and hurried down the broad stairs, still humming.

MY grandfather was sitting before the fireplace in the library, where I rarely went unless his presence beckoned me, for it was in the library that I had found my father . . . stretched full length on a rug, with a stain of blood on the shirt front

that had been so white, and with a revolver in his already cold right hand. . . . Such pictures become associated with walls and, naturally, one shuns the walls that bring them out.

As I entered the library, my grandfather started abruptly and I saw, as he rose to greet me, that he was shaking, and my heart grew heavy.

I had realized he was growing old, of course; tremulousness and waning strength tell the onlooker of that; but I had hoped that his aging might be entirely peaceful. That it was not was all too apparent, and, for me, almost tragically so.

Only the night before I had happened upon him when he was opening a cabinet in which he kept the finest pieces of his collection, made up of temple gods, and after a startled jerk he ordered me, and most curtly, from the room. I had never known him to speak so to me before.

AS my grandfather bowed before me I saw that his eyes were troubled, and I would have said, "Dear, what is the matter? What is it that disturbs you lately?" had he not spoken quickly, to say: "You're lovely, child! Lovely! And who is the lucky young man?"

"Tony Steele," I answered, and as I did I heard the whir of the doorbell. Knowing who awaited me, I kissed my grandfather goodnight and hurried from the room.

To my surprise, I found Harkins standing in the hall; tension in his body; a strain on his face. He spoke quickly and his words almost tumbled over each other from his nervousness and haste.

"Miss Anne," he said, "if I may be speakin' to you a short moment, I shall be that grateful to you, Miss Anne!" He paused, breathing hard; his eyes entreating me.

"Why certainly, Harkins," I answered (I was very fond of him; he had served us for years and most faithfully and efficiently), and I added: "What is it?"

"It's this, Miss Anne," he said, "and I'm that troubled I must speak of it, although I was ordered not to, and I'll take it kindly, from you, Miss Anne, if you won't tell him that I told you——"

"You know, Harkins," I responded, "that I wouldn't do anything to hurt you, if I could help it——"

"Bless you, Miss Anne," he said, "and I am knowing that, knowing you, if I may be so bold as to say it. It's them little gods what your grandfather and your own father collected. I wish you could persuade him to be gettin' rid of 'em, Miss Anne, and that I do!" He mopped his brow as he finished, and I saw that it was beaded with sweat.

I know I lost some color, because the little gods had not added happiness to the lives of "the tragic Belmonts."

The one my father felt had carried all his luck disappeared on the night of his death, with an onyx ring he always wore, on which was carved the Belmont arms. We had never learned what he did with either of these, the most cherished of all possessions, and such things when connected with suicide do make question.

I moistened my lips before I spoke. They were stiff and dry. "Harkins," I said, "do you mind telling me why you feel this way?"

He grew white and he looked over his shoulder into a shadowed space of the hall.

"They rearranges themselves in that cabinet every night, they do," he said, "and *he*——" (he meant my grandfather) "he knows it, and he watches for it and it's turning him sick. And no wonder, Miss Anne, for it's the work of devils."

I tried to laugh. I said, after an

effort, "but, Harkins—that's *absurd!*" Again he mopped his brow.

"I wish, Miss Anne, it was," he said. And again he looked over his shoulder and toward the shadowed space. His voice dropped and when it did, the quality of his whisper made my flesh creep. . . .

"He sets 'em back in the cabinet each night," Harkins told me; "in a row, he sets 'em. He locks the cabinet. He takes the key and he puts it in the safe. And he turns the knobs and the safe is locked for all but him. . . . And anyway, bein' as you know it is at the head of his bed, nobody could get in it, even if they knew the combination."

"I know," I agreed. "Go on, Harkins."

HARKINS dropped his voice even lower. "In the mornin'," he said, "them little gods is in groups . . . like the devil himself had let 'em have the use of their legs . . . in one corner or t'other of that locked cabinet . . . and each mornin' he goes to that cabinet . . . and he gets to shakin' as he opens it, and he can't stop that shakin', brave man as he is. And he sets them little gods back into place, and they grin at him, evil, and they wait till night . . . to go where they pleases to go—again—"

"Harkins," I said, and my voice was not quite steady, "this can't be true!"

"Before God, my Maker, it is," Harkins said, "and you and me, Miss Anne, we gotta be doin' somethin' or it'll be killin' him, the goin's on of them gods, killin' him from shock."

"I'll investigate it," I promised; "meanwhile, Harkins, you'll watch, and if we can't discover what makes the change, you and I will spend a night in the library."

"Yes, Miss," Harkness answered, not too happily, and I know I was trembling, and I felt myself to be a fool, I couldn't believe Harkins' tale; it was too far-fetched even for me, who had no reason to love the small idols which my father had collected. And yet I trembled. "I'll get in early," I promised, "and I'll take a look at the cabinet myself before I go up."

"Very well, Miss," Harkins murmured.

"And meantime, you keep an eye on things, Harkins. If you watch, nothing can go wrong," I said, as cheerfully and evenly as I could.

"It would seem so, Miss," Harkins agreed, but without conviction.

I had a curious shock then, which came from the fact that I thought some one laughed at my elbow, and now I started and looked over my shoulder.

"The cook is havin' company in the basement settin' room," Harkins explained, and over-quickly it seemed to me, even then, when I was without suspicion. I remember I looked at Harkins searchingly.

I had never known our old Agnes to have visitors. She was a recluse, whose only companions were the seasonings on our kitchen shelves and the pots on our kitchen walls.

I decided, hurrying toward Tony who waited for me in the drawing-room, that I would find out whether Agnes had had guests.

AS we drove toward the house in Germantown where Tony and I were to find a pleasant sort of hospitality, Tony opened the old subject again.

"Hang it all, Anne," he said, "you know I'd make any girl a perfect husband!"

I laughed, although when Tony spoke of himself as a husband my heart always skipped a beat and then set to aching; for, in the language of another season's song, I loved Tony in "the good, old-fashioned way."

I closed my eyes a moment and

then I managed to say, and quite steadily, "There are reasons why I can't marry, Tony, you know, and we've threshed this all through before!"

He said, and loudly, surely: "Now, Anne, in the bright lexicon of flappers there ain't no such word as 'can't' . . . and you, my dear child, are going to find you can. And I know it. But I regret this stalling. It's so perfectly unnecessary and pointless and I've asked all the ushers to ush and they're always asking when! Makes it deuced awkward!" he ended, with a grin at me, which I caught by reason of a street lamp which flashed by us.

I advised him against counting chickens before they were hatched. He fumbled for my hand; he found it to hold it tightly in his, and said aloud, "You know darned well you love me and I know it too. 'I could not love thee, dear, so well' if thou didst not love me a little, too. . . ."

I said nothing. I couldn't. I did love him, but at that time I felt I could not marry him; I knew, indeed, I could not marry anyone!

THERE was a good deal of cutting in that night at Mrs. Todd-Gunthrie's and I didn't dance with Tony long at any one time; which was better for my peace! But along toward twelve Tony came across the dance floor to me with a rather grim set to his lips and I supposed he had decided to get a full dance with me even if he offended my partner, who had, only the second before, taken me from Tony's leadership.

"Sorry, Anne," he said reaching us, and I noticed he spoke a little loudly, and that his lips were still grim, "but I have a message for you, if Dent will excuse you for this."

"Oh, I say, too awfully rotten of you, Tony!" young Mr. Dent put in; but Tony, his hand under my arm, was not to be dissuaded and almost immediately he was piloting me across the floor to Mrs. Todd-Gunthrie, who was obviously waiting for me, and with strain on her face.

"Anne, dear child," she said when I reached her, "I am so sorry but I have a telephone message about your grandfather, who is not quite well, and his physician wants you to come home, dear."

I know I changed color.

"It's all right, darling," Tony said in an undertone, his hand still under my arm. "We'll pick right up and motor in."

"I'll get my wrap," I said, breathlessly.

WHEN I came down the broad, old stairs, Tony was waiting me and looking up at me with an expression that broke my heart. His eyes and his whole face would have told any of the world who looked on that he loved me. And how that look made me love him! I, who must never show it.

"All set, dear?" he said, and with a forced cheerfulness, as we slipped from the house and out on the terrace where motor lights made a glaring, optic confusion.

His car was waiting; his chauffeur closed us in.

"Tony," I questioned, "just how—serious is — grandfather's condition?"

He put an arm around me to draw me close and I rested my head on his shoulder, which is just the right height for that. He drew a deep breath.

"Dear," he said, "it may not be so bad. You must remember such things are not always bad. He's had a slight stroke."

Then all I remember is riding so fast that Tony had to interview the police the next day, and Tony holding my hand against his firm,

straight lips, until we stopped on Spruce Street before the door which then meant "Home" to me.

CHAPTER II

A RING ON CREPE

ALICE admitted us, a young and very pretty brunette maid who had been with us only a short month, and who had evidently grown an affection for us, for she was crying in the frank and unrestrained manner of her class, and her tears added to the terror that was already in my heart.

"Harkins," she whispered roughly, between sobs, "he's upstairs with the Admiral and the doctors. They want you—to *hurry*, Miss Anne."

I nodded, slipped from my coat and ran the full length of the stairs and Tony followed me. In the upper hall I paused at my grandfather's open door to look in.

He was lying on his back, breathing loudly and laboredly, his eyes fixed with a glassy stare on the ceiling. The physician, who had attended our family ever since I could remember, was stooping above the bed, and another younger doctor stood by him, attentive and heavily sober.

Doctor Powers turned as I entered the room.

"Well, child," he said, taking my hand to hold it between both of his. Dimly I felt his patting it; dimly I heard his clearing of throat, which was made, I suspect, by his groping after words that would comfort me.

"This comes to us all, my dear," he said rather ponderously after what seemed a long, long interval, "and I expect you to be as fine as I know you to be, as brave."

That said, "No hope." For a moment I couldn't speak. When I could, I answered with "I'll try to be brave," and I managed to keep it almost steady.

HARKINS, who came from the bathroom at that moment with something that one of the doctors needed, sobbed aloud. I went to stand by the head of my grandfather's bed. He was going; even I could see it. And after he was gone I knew I would be, must be, alone for all time, or at least all my time upon earth.

Looking down I saw my grandfather's eyes move, and I saw that he wanted something, perhaps to tell me something. I saw, too, his right hand move; it was his left side that had been crippled and made helpless by the stroke.

"Harkins, a pencil!" ordered Doctor Powers, who saw and read, with me, my grandfather's wish.

Harkins brought the pencil from my grandfather's desk, together with a pad. I remember the pad oddly. I think the visual memory is sharpened by shock.

Perhaps shock and hurt sharpen all the faculties. I know the Indians starting their hunts, in which the power of scent is a great help, run barbed grasses through their nostrils.

Anyway, something made my eyes more keen than they would have been in a level, every-day, undramatic moment. The pad was made of a rough, flaking, gray sort of paper and it was glued at the top of each sheet against a purple strip of cloth. This left on some of the sheets a little roughened, intermittent line of purple. Every one has seen, in hardened glue, this proof that paper comes from a pad.

Doctor Powers slipped the pad under my grandfather's hand and he put the pencil between my grandfather's long, slender, white fingers. My grandfather, with great effort, scrawled, "Keep—the gods," then "Ruby——"

RUBI was the shortened form of my Russian mother's long name and my grandfather had spelled it "Ruby" during that stormy time while she tried to belong to the Belmonts, in spirit as well as in flesh, and to old Philadelphia.

I know I looked my bafflement. It had been so long since he had mentioned her in any way; he who had made the first divorce in the Belmont family and, my grandfather thought, my father's suicide.

My grandfather's eloquent, misery-filled eyes searched mine. He saw I did not comprehend. He tried to write again, and after some effort he managed to repeat his scrawled order, and again I read, "Keep the gods."

Leaning over him and deciphering this, I said, loudly: "Grandfather, I will keep the gods. I will not let them go out of my possession."

What made me look at Harkins then, I don't know, but I did look at him, and I saw on his face an expression that appalled me. It was full of greed and pleasure; an almost bestial satisfaction, perhaps I had better say.

He looked away from me quickly, after our eyes had met, and again his face took on the sober droop of an old servant who must watch his master's passing.

ALICE sobbed aloud. I heard her whisper, "Oh, poor Miss Anne." I heard Doctor Powers order her out of the room, and she left sobbing.

My grandfather was trying to write something else. I could not decipher it; I saw my father's name and then a word that began with S. I supposed he wanted to write something of his son's, and my father's, shooting himself.

Perhaps he was wandering, I reflected in lower current of mind while the active mind was given wholly to my misery.

Suddenly my grandfather's stare grew even glassier. Doctor Powers leaned above him, a hand on his breast. "Gone," he said.

Tony came to take the tablet. I remember that clearly and nothing much else.

I think Doctor Powers took me to my room. I know he gave me a sleeping draught and that Alice put me to bed as if I were a baby, sobbing as she undressed me, and petting me as would an old nurse. I was certain that night that I had never known so warm a heart as that which beat in pretty, brunette Alice.

WHEN I woke up, I did not at first remember. Then the fact, the appalling, heart-stopping fact, came back. I sat up in bed.

Alice, who had been sitting by my bed and watching over me, stood up. Her eyes were fearfully tear-stained, but she was controlled.

She asked me whether I would breakfast in bed and I refused. Then she ran my bath and I got up, weak and shaking, to dress as quickly as I could.

I wanted to get downstairs and to hear from Harkins about the last moments, about the cabinet; if there had been any change in it. And I wanted to interpret, if I could, that look of Harkins' which had so disturbed me the night before.

The look had been malicious in its greed and in its sly satisfaction. I had to know what it meant and whether any especial shock had sent this attack to my grandfather. I would punish Harkins if he needed punishment; and I would do that in spite of all his years of faithfulness, I decided grimly.

I went downstairs unsteadily. The great drawing-rooms were closed. I

shook hideously going by those closed doors.

"You are alone," they said to me; "you will always be alone."

Harkins awaited me in the dining-room. I sat down to try to eat. Of course I could not touch food; the mere smell of it nauseated me.

"Harkins!" I said suddenly; he jumped.

"Harkins," I repeated, "I want to hear of last night."

He drew a deep breath. "Very well, Miss Anne," he replied.

"I want to know exactly what happened," I ordered.

He drew close to my chair, and standing before me, hands dropped to his sides, head raised as it always was when he announced our visitors, he gave me a resume of the activities of my grandfather's last evening upon earth.

"AT ten, Mr. Barricault Stewart dropped in," he said; "Mr. Stewart came here directly from the Army and Navy Club, where he had spent the evening in the company with other gentlemen. He left after a short call. Alice let him out."

"Why?" I asked abruptly. Harkins flushed.

"Mr. Stewart once complained of me," he admitted stiffly. "I let him trip over a rug," he explained.

I said, "Go on," having heard of Mr. Stewart's poor, blind fear of anyone who did not lead him tenderly.

"Alice delivered Mr. Stewart to his chauffeur," Harkins continued, "and coming back she stopped in to answer Admiral Belmont's ring, which came from the library as she was passing it, and which she heard without consulting the board. He was sittin' lookin' at the biggest god which has been out of the cabinet a long time, and on the library table, if you recall, Miss Anne."

I nodded.

"He was lookin' at it queer, Alice said. When she come in, for a while he did not look up nor give her the reason for his ringin', although she coughed twice, thinkin' to draw his attention."

Harkins paused.

"Then?" I prompted.

"Then"—Harkins began again and after a deep breath—"then Admiral Belmont ordered malted milk and some biscuits; hot malted milk it was he ordered. The cook had gone up to her quarters, so Alice, she fixed the milk, and when she went back with it some five minutes later I heard her scream.

"From the basement and through the double doors that lead to the front of the house I heard her screaming and I ran up, sudden as was possible for a man of my years and size. I found Alice crouched against the door, the malted milk spilled, the biscuits on the floor and the glass and plate broke. Holding her tray clutched to her, she was—and screamin'. I then——"

"Go on," I ordered stridently, "not what you did; but what you saw!"

Harkins drew a deep breath before he began.

He said: "Admiral Belmont was staring, glassy-eyed, at that god, and it had a hole bored over its heart, anyway, to the left of its ugly body. There was a dagger stuck in this hole. There was—there was—a little drop of blood on the god's—begging your pardon, Miss—the god's abdomen, below the dagger."

Harkins grew suddenly very white and beads of moisture stood out on his forehead. "Miss Anne, beggin' your pardon," he whispered unsteadily, "I can't—go on—no more."

"Was there more?" I asked, loudly, shrilly.

Harkins gasped and nodded. At last he managed to say: "A drop of blood, it was on your grandfather's

shirt front too and over his heart, like it was on the god, and the god it hasn't no eyes no more, they'd been pried out."

FOR a moment things wavered before me; the little swimming black spots that presage a loss of consciousness filled the air; then, by deliberate effort, I came back. I had much to learn and, perhaps, much to do. I must be strong.

"Harkins," I managed to question, "the cabinet?"

He held trembling fingers against pallid, slack, tremulous lips; looking to either side apprehensively; then over his shoulder. A little current of air, it must have been that, set the swinging door that was between the dining-room and the pantry into motion.

I watched this, my mouth growing dry. Harkins whimpered and clutched a chair for support. He stood, rigid; I sat, rigid; both of us staring, hypnotized, by that slow swing of the door.

Looking at each other once again, I said, somewhat breathlessly and in undertone, "Well, Harkins—the—the cabinet?"

"Miss Anne," Harkins answered, "I'll be tellin' you later, if you don't mind, and where there ain't nothin' what can move nor spy. In the garden, if you will, Miss Anne. Please, Miss Anne."

His petition was close to agonizing. I nodded and I ordered him to send Alice to me.

ALICE told me much the same story that Harkins had told; but she was even less controlled than Harkins had been, and once and again she sobbed so deeply that it seemed cruel to force her, but I had to know what had preceded the stroke.

"Alice," I began, "did Mr. Stewart leave my grandfather in his usual, pleasant way?"

She sobbed deeply, nodded, caught her breath and answered: "Yessem, if you might say, Miss Anne, it was more than usual pleasant. He says, Mr. Stewart says to Admiral Belmont: 'You know, friend, I envy you your collection.' And Mr. Stewart, he was meanin', Miss Anne, them gods——"

"Yes," I said, knowing very well Mr. Stewart's passion for collecting such small gods as had been made for the worship of men.

Mr. Stewart had always envied my grandfather's possession of a few small monstrosities in idols that had come from some far-famed Tibet temple which my grandfather had visited during one of his many cruises. Mr. Stewart had begged my grandfather to sell to him, if he ever sold them to anyone, these particular examples of multi-theism. His remark was the one he always made in our house, and a perfectly normal one for him to make.

"Then, Alice?" I prompted.

"Then they said good-night real pleasant," Alice went on, "and I took Mr. Stewart, and a grand man he is indeed"—again she sobbed—"out to the door. His chauffeur come up to lead him down the steps.

He says, real pleasant, 'Good-night, Alice'—he'd heard Admiral Belmont call me 'Alice'—'and thank yuh, Alice,' he says. And again he says, 'Good-night, Alice'; and then the chauffeur drove him off, he starin' straight ahead through them black glasses like he does and all the blind does. And then I went back. And—and, Harkins, he's told you the rest, Miss Anne?"

I nodded; I covered my face with my hands a moment and I heard Alice leave the room, crying unrestrainedly as she withdrew.

OF COURSE the old and close friends came with offers to help, and with so much sympathy that I could hardly bear it. But what was there to do?

I received most of the visitors because I knew that was the thing my grandfather would have wished me to do. I remember, and too well, his stern, set face, his dry eyes, his absolute control and his unfailing courtesy to those friends who came to offer him their sympathy, when his son lay dead where he now lay. Only with the difference, and a wide one it was, that his son, and my father, had died by his own wish and hand.

Tony came at eleven, and before he joined me in a small, rear reception-room I heard him whispering with Harkins in the hall. I wondered at it a little, but not for long, because when he was with me, he made me forget everything but the fact that I loved him.

Never had he been more gentle, nor had he ever, and without so much as a touch, shown me how deeply he cared. Even in that dark hour, and with every promise of more of his love denied me, I was helped. But a little later and I felt that nothing that was lovely could endure for me.

Tony left as other visitors came. I followed him to the hall, meaning to ask him to come back later so that I might tell him of what Harkins had told me of the gods. And I saw a piece of conduct that is compatible with the masculine viewpoint if you like, but which seemed so odd, so disappointing to me, from Tony!

Alice had given him his gloves and his stick. She stood, simpering, with his hat in her hands.

I heard Tony say—his back was toward me—"And what's your name, pretty child?"

"Alice, sir," she said before she saw me.

"Alice," he repeated. "Not Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?"

And this, right outside of the door where my grandfather lay dead! And this while Tony knew my heart was breaking, and immediately upon leaving me whom he had pretended to love!

I did not so much blame Alice, a poor little light-weight who would naturally respond to a gentleman's blandishments no matter what the circumstances! But Tony!

"No, sir"—she answered his question about her name, answered it giggling—"it's Alice Moore, sir."

Then she saw me and became the decorous servant. I didn't ask Tony to come back. I turned in the hall and swiftly retraced my steps. I was hurt, deeply hurt. I felt more than ever alone, although I knew that from circumstance Tony and I could not walk the years together.

JUST as I was about to ring for Harkins with the idea of going with him to the enclosed garden at the rear of the house so that I might hear of what had happened to, or in, the cabinet, Mr. Stewart and his daughter came.

I told Alice to ask them to join me in the small, old-fashioned reception-room and, as I waited, I wished that the acid virgin, Felicia Stewart, had not come with her father, who was so dear to me. I knew her presence would subdue us both and keep Mr. Stewart from saying words that would have so helped me. He was always restrained in his daughter's company, and no wonder!

With every breath she drew one felt her hostility to him and to those who were his friends. What made this was a loud rumor. She had never forgiven her father for having forbidden her to marry a scoundrel of a Polish nobleman. For this reason her treatment of her father was everything it should not have been.

It was also said that Miss Janette

Stewart, Mr. Stewart's sister, had sided with her niece on this question; that his adopted son was a parasite and weakling, and, altogether, that Mr. Stewart's life was anything but happy!

Now Felicia led him, but in a stiff, hard sort of way, into the room.

"Anne?" he said questioningly, as he moved his head.

"Here, Mr. Stewart," I answered.

He put out his hands and I hurried to him to put both of mine into them. I saw his daughter's lips curl and I did not wonder, at that moment, at the scorn that the Stewart women reaped from their world who loved Mr. Stewart.

I ignored Felicia, a thing I had never done to any woman who was, because beneath our roof, our guest. But she had merely inclined her head on meeting me and she had then sneered at me and at her father. I think I have never seen so ugly an expression as hers while she sat there, doing her unwilling waiting.

"I am—one of the few—who are left from—the old guard!" said Mr. Stewart unsteadily; "for that reason, Anne, you must let me be your friend and let me help you in any way I can."

Felicia sent him a venom-laden look. For the first time I saw a compensation in his being blind. She moved aggressively; she coughed and, when Alice came in with a message for me, Felicia actually turned upon her a frown.

Alice brought me word of a long-distance call; one of my grandfather's oldest friends wished to speak with me, if I were willing. I excused myself and slipped into the hall.

WHEN I came back I paused a moment before I joined the Stewarts; a muted crying I had heard weakened me. And while I waited for control I heard Felicia Stewart's voice, shrill, clear, cold, as she spoke to Alice.

"I imagine Miss Belmont will close this house," she said, "and in such case you will have to find a new post, won't you? By the way, what's your name?"

"Alice," Alice answered timidly, unwillingly.

"Well, I need a second maid," Felicia Stewart stated, "and you'll find less work and more food with us."

I heard Mr. Stewart's appeal, a whispered, "Please, Felicia," and I heard her sneering laugh. It made me see her look, which I knew went with her laugh, and it made me hate her, even then, when nothing but sorrow mattered, or lived for me.

"It's all very well for you to be so remote, father," she said, "but I have to engage and keep the servants. This girl seems willing, and I thought if this house were closed——"

"But it is hardly the time," Mr. Stewart murmured, "to make such arrangements, is it?" He sounded like a groping, confused, hurt old man, who knows that he makes his protesst in vain. My heart ached for him!

"Indeed," Felicia answered him, "and so you will tell me when and when not to make my household arrangements?"

"I didn't mean to annoy you, Felicia, I only——" he apologized, voice shaking.

I broke in then and quickly. For a little time I could save Mr. Stewart from the sharpness of his shrewish daughter's tongue. Again I settled near Mr. Stewart and again I laid my hands in his.

"Dear child," he whispered; "poor little Anne!" and I saw his lips twitch. Suddenly he added, voice strong and almost cheery: "We will help you." (I liked the "we.") "We will teach you hope and that will tell you how to live happily again!"

I thanked him unsteadily. I loved him more than ever.

IT was mid-day before I found my chance for a talk with Harkins; then, in the little enclosure that was made so snug by the tall buildings that had grown up around it, I stood by a brick wall shivering, and Harkins faced me.

"Well, Harkins?" I prompted.

"They was moved, Miss—or they moved," he whispered, looking around him as he had before at each mention of the gods. "They was in a circle, on the second shelf, and in the centre of the circle—in the centre of the circle——" He paused to moisten his lips, to look around again. All courage seemed to be drained from him, all voice gone with his courage.

"*What?*" I questioned almost stridently.

"Your—your father's ring, Miss. The one that was missin' after his—after his—death, Miss. And a bit of crepe like is flutterin' from the door—this minute—that was—under the ring—Miss."

We stood, two trembling, blinded mortals, knowing not what to think!

"Where is that ring now?" I questioned when I felt I could speak.

Harkins shook his head, and I saw him swallow convulsively.

"Gone," he said, "and for all I know the cabinet has not been unlocked."

A blind, dizzy moment, and I turned toward the kitchen door, and as I passed through the kitchen I realized I had not seen Agnes that morning. Poor old Agnes, who must be suffering, so many years she had cooked for my grandfather!

"Alice," I said, as I paused in the kitchen on my way to the front of the house, "did Agnes have guests last night?"

"Agnes?" she echoed with a surprise I could understand, "Agnes have guests? Oh, no, Miss Anne! She went to bed early, you know. She was in bed before he rung for the late supper that he always took. And this morning she's not been down yet. I didn't call her. I been doin' her work, knowin' as how she must be feelin'."

I said a limp "That was kind of you, Alice." Then, groping even more, I hurried through the dining-room and toward the front of the house, now so still, so empty, making me know I was so alone!

I must interview Agnes, I realized, and a few minutes later I spoke to Alice of this. "Yes, Miss Anne," she said, "and queer enough, she was sayin' to me late last night as how she wanted a word with you; somethin' about Mr. Harkins she wanted to tell yuh, I think she said."

Callers came then and I was diverted, and when the free moment came and I sent for Agnes she had disappeared! "But her things?" I questioned of Harkins; "her clothes, her trunk?"

Harkins made that motion I had come to expect from him. He looked quickly to either side and then over his shoulder.

"Nothing is disturbed," he responded in a whisper, "but on her trunk—on her trunk—there's one of them little gods—a-settin'."

I felt myself grow limp; then I set my chin and I lifted my head. "We'll track this nonsense to its starting-place!" I vowed and loudly.

I saw Harkins trembling. "Miss Anne," he warned me, and spoke in so low a voice that I could hardly hear him, "I believe it would be best—to leave them little gods—*alone!*"

CHAPTER III

NOTES AND ALARMS

AGNES did not come back. I notified the police of her disappearance, of course, but I told them nothing of the god on her trunk, nor of the other occult happenings that had put

the serenity which had been in the house so far away.

Somehow, I could not bring myself to broadcast a fact that would have made me seem a fit subject for a psychopathic ward. And then, too, I doubted whether those reassuringly loud-voiced, matter-of-fact, blue-clad men would have found help through anything so apart from the temper of the crime with which they usually dealt. I told them flatly that the cook was gone. They made their notes and put their questions to Alice, Harkins and myself.

A week later they returned to tell me what I had told them—that my cook was gone!

Tony, who in spite of coldness which I could not seem to help showing when with him, ran in frequently, and I thought he took the matter of Agnes's disappearance with an almost cruel lightness.

"After all, Anne," he said, "you know cooks are forever leaving. So why the excitement? Why the drama?"

"She's come to some unhappy end," I said, close to hysterically; "I know it. I feel tragedy." Then, before I knew it, I was telling Tony all that I had vowed I would not tell him, after I had found him to be an average man and not a bit above a little flirtation with a pretty maid.

He listened interestedly as I told him Harkins' tale of Agnes' trunk and the god, all of it, and twice he made notes. And as he listened I felt that easing of burden which comes when another assumes half of the weight.

But, later, and only a little later, I lost my feeling of having an ally, for as Tony left I heard him say to Alice —and he must have known I heard— "You're not going to play me a shabby trick by disappearing, sweet Alice? Can't have that!"

And she said, "Oh, no, sir!" with the giggle that his sallies always evoked from her, and a roll of eyes that made me want to kill her!

Well, so much for men, I thought bitterly, and I resolved I would forget Tony. I learned after that, by the bye, that the kind of man you think you must forget is the kind of man you never can forget, with all your trying!

FORTUNATELY for me, there was a good deal during those first, solitary dark days to absorb me. After my grandfather's funeral I learned of my financial state, which was about as bad as it could be.

The house was heavily mortgaged, and only the furnishings in it were mine. Too many of the pieces were of the cumbersome, scrolled walnut period that is not sought by the antique maniacs, yet the result of the sale would have seemed a good deal to anyone who had not been reared as had I.

Much to my surprise, Harkins wanted to buy the collection of idols from me. And he offered me a price that amazed me.

"But, Harkins," I said, and for the first time in all the years of his serving me I spoke chilly to him, "you heard my grandfather's instruction? You know he wanted me to keep his collection?"

"Yes, Miss," said Harkins, flushing, "but I thought as how I'd been this long in the family, as how you'd maybe feel different-like."

I paid no heed to that. "And what's more," I said, "how did you ever amass so much as three thousand dollars that, without a turn of a hair, you could pay for a fad? A gentleman's 'hobby'?" I emphasized this a little cruelly.

Harkins flushed even more, but his chin went up.

"I been savin' this long, Miss Anne," he informed me, "and always honest. I have my own reasons for

wantin' them gods which I cannot explain." And then, his hauteur slipping away, he added in the manner of a servant, "And will that be all, Miss Anne?"

"Quite all, Harkins," I answered, and he disappeared.

Sitting alone then before a desk on which were the items of sale: the handleless Wedgewood cups that had brought so much, the Steigel glass, the canvas attributed to Georgione, and so on, I felt, for the first time, a doubt of Harkins.

I remembered that he and Alice had been at swords' points ever since she came into the house; that Agnes had become more friendly with Alice than she had been with Harkins, and that for some reason those who knew him best distrusted him.

The fog seemed to be intensifying rather than thinning. I felt that there was a way to find the truth, a gate that would open to let in the clarifying, shadow-dissipating mid-day light. But where this gate? Where?

AFTER I settled my affairs, I took a suite at The Ritz, and this brought upon me the strong disapproval of the world to which I belonged.

As more than one old friend pointed out, the result of the sale, had it been properly invested, would have guaranteed a roof above me and plain food for me for the rest of my days, and to this I had to agree! The truth of the statement was obvious! And to their objection to my actions I had to maintain a silence.

Oh, I was disciplined those days! But I had my reasons for doing as I did; reasons I could not explain, even to my closest and my oldest friends.

One of my training could not say, "I saw my father made a weakling by depending upon that to which he had grown used; I saw him choose his inheritance instead of a life with my mother, when my grandfather made money or a wife alternatives. I intend, for this reason, to start out in life without backing or aid; I intend in this way, if I can, to prove to myself that the weak Belmont strain is not in me."

No, I couldn't say that. Instead I could only do that which I had vowed I would do, which was to spend every cent I had and then begin my battle.

I gave lavishly to charities; I bought the most absurd and useless things. My new black raiment was of the best. I hired the finest car I could locate and a chauffeur. I ordered expensive foods; I spent desperately and with intent, for I was eager to begin my quest.

ON the day when I was close to the bankruptcy I craved, Mr. Barricault Stewart called. He was announced by telephone and I asked him to come up. I was glad to see that our Alice led him to my door, and I spoke to her as one does speak to a servant who has been faithful and good, even though I could not like her because of jealousy.

"Alice," I said, "I'm very glad you went to the Stewarts."

"I went because of Mr. Stewart," she answered bluntly.

"Alice is a good girl—a good girl," said Mr. Stewart as he reached gropingly toward me.

Alice then settled in the hall on a bench that was near the elevator, and Mr. Stewart and I sat down in my sitting-room. I was glad to see him alone, for I wanted to ask a question which I thought he might answer and which, answered, would help me.

"Mr. Stewart, I want a little help," I began.

"And I want yours," he interrupted, "but forgive me, my dear, for breaking in. And let me hear of your need first."

"It's a strange question," I began,

"or it may seem so, but, Mr. Stewart, do you think there is any occult power in the little gods?" and then I told him of the cabinet; of the small god with the hole bored above its heart; of how I had felt that my grandfather's stroke of paralysis had been induced by shock. "If I were sure that he had been tormented, hurt, frightened and so hurried into death by anyone's malicious plannings," I added, my voice shaking, "I would stop at no punishment I could, with all effort, inflict."

He answered me in his gentle, thoughtful slow way, and it soothed me. "Anne," he said, "the power of any inanimate object lies in what it can make a human imagine. Only that. There are men who have gone mad from staring at Buddhas. I think your grandfather had collected the little gods too long; I think the fact that your father, your grandfather's poor, unhappy son, started the collection, had its influence upon your grandfather's balance. I think —I know that is all," he ended surely. He paused a moment and then he went on. "I understand also," he said, "that Harkins had the house keys on his ring and those that had once been your father's. Certainly your father had a key to that cabinet?"

I started. I knew that Harkins must have had a key to the cabinet. But Harkins! I still had a little faith in him, and I could not think why he would wish to frighten my grandfather! Yet why, the night of grandfather's death, had Harkins sent to me that sly, greedy look which had expressed satisfaction?

"I suppose," I murmured, "there was a second key." I laughed a little, a laugh that was weak and unsteady because of my relief.

It is a strange thing, but I have found from my own experience that any explanation, no matter how gory, that keeps happenings out of the realm of the physic, is satisfying to humans and is preferred by them.

"How stupid people are at solving mysteries!" I went on; "I simply never thought of that obvious possibility!"

Mr. Stewart smiled. "People are stupid about finding truth," he agreed, and he went on to say, "Alice told me that she had seen Harkins meddling with the cabinet, but that she did not report it, because he threatened her with a dismissal if she did. He pointed out to her that she was new and that he was old and trusted."

It hurt me, and badly; I had been so fond of Harkins that I hoped for an explanation that would again let me trust him, and fully.

MR. STEWART, in asking aid of me, was asking me to work for him. He wanted someone to read to him. He wanted information that had to do with his collection followed by someone who was enough alert to do this—catalogues studied, all that sort of thing—and he pointed out to me in his usually thoughtful and kind way the fact that I could, while working for him, use my free time, which he said would be a good deal, to learn stenography, which I would probably need in another position.

"I am sixty-eight," he stated, as he ended this part of our conversation, "and I shall not always be here. There are few people, I am afraid, dear child, who would, with gratitude, pay you as I shall for your very real talents. Therefore, as you work for me, we will equip you for the needs of the larger, hurrying world."

I thanked him, almost tremulously. He brushed my gratitude aside with, "Dear child, to help those whom one loves is a form of selfishness." Then he asked me quite abruptly whether I was going to marry Tony Steele.

I said a loud, almost harsh, "No."

He hesitated a moment; after his hesitation he said, "Anne, I'm glad. I don't trust the young man any more than I trust Harkins. By the way, do you know that Harkins is now in Steele's employ?"

I didn't. I admitted it, as my heart suspended for a beat and then went on too swiftly.

"Harkins is now opening Steele's door," Mr. Stewart stated, nodding, frowning. "I don't understand it," he admitted, "I don't understand it!"

AFTER Mr. Stewart's departure, Tony Steele telephoned me; he was across the street at the Manufacturers' Club and he told me so and he added a request that I let him run over to see me. I refused, stiffly and curtly.

"What's up, Anne?" he asked, his voice worried. "What little fairy has put me in wrong? I've felt the cold for some time, but today we've hit the pole!"

I said, "Tony, I don't care to discuss it." Then he told me I wasn't fair to him and there was a strained lull. I ended this by saying, and my heart broke as I did it, "Tony, my society days are over and you'd best forget me; really put me out of your life and thoughts. Tomorrow I begin to be a working girl."

"The devil you do!" he commented angrily, perturbedly.

"I'm going to work for Mr. Stewart," I said.

"You're not!" he answered, and he almost shouted it. I hung up the receiver and, heart beating hard and aching harder, I turned toward the window. Here I stood, swayed against the casement, staring listlessly down upon Broad Street.

How long I would have stood there I don't know, I was so dulled and hurt by the new loneliness, by Tony, everything; but a slight sound attracted my attention and I turned to see that a note had been slipped beneath my door. I crossed the room swiftly to pick it up.

It was written in pencil and upon a foreign paper that was water-marked with "La Pensee." The pansy, and—"Pansies for thoughts"—a suitable name, for it did start my thoughts!

It read: "Miss Belmont will do well to refuse Mr. Stewart's *flattering* offer." And for a moment I was dismayed, but when I saw, in the note and its underlined word, Felicia Stewart's sarcasm, my apprehension died, and I gleaned only a little more contempt for Felicia as I read her message, the reason for which was so transparent to me. Of course, she did not want me, a spy from her world, in her land; watching her and in a position to make report of her. I laughed, reading the note.

My telephone rang; I answered it to hear a strange male voice. "Are you accepting the position Mr. Stewart has offered you?" this demanded. I did not answer. The voice whispered a loud, low, wheezy "Don't!"

I answered as would a member of my father's world, while speaking with a tradesman. "Miss Anne Belmont has accepted the position that Mr. Stewart has so kindly offered her, and with gratitude," I said, slowly, coolly; and I hung up the receiver. After which I got the operator as quickly as I could and asked her to trace the call if this were possible.

I waited a moment; then I heard the tinkle of my telephone bell and then the operator's voice came to me; "The call you asked about came from the Manufacturers' Club," she said in the singsong way in which all telephone employees seem to speak. I said, "Thank you," and hung up.

I knew, of course, that Tony was not the only man in the Manufactur-

ers' Club and yet, that he had been there, I knew, too. And I further knew that he felt I would have to marry him if I could not find a way to earn my daily bread. I smiled, wondering whether he thought he could frighten me.

I smiled bitterly and unhappily; for if Tony had descended to this ruse, as I suspected he had, he was contemptible, small; not even the man I had thought him to be, flirting with Alice, our maid!

And then, suddenly, my smile faded and my eyes filled, for I loved him in spite of my suspicions of him; I loved him in spite of everything! And I knew at that moment that even after a long, long life I would be still loving him, when my heart ran down; and that if there were another life, I would be loving him when I woke up to make my second start. Some women are made this way—heaven help them!

Someone tapped at my door, and I opened it to find a page who wore an impudent and an endearing smile and a sprinkling of hale, summer freckles across his snub nose. He carried a note from Tony.

"My dear": Tony had written in this, "The Shadows, Stewart's place, is reputed to be haunted. Queer things happen there. I don't want you to go. Please trust me, who would serve you, dearest, forever and amen. —Tony."

It was a serious note for Tony. I considered it as my heart warmed a little to him. Yet what else was there for me but this work? And who could be a kinder employer than my father's and my grandfather's friend? And what could there be for me to fear at The Shadows?

I could not see. "But I shall see!" I vowed grimly, "and I shall show any onlooker who cares enough to watch that I am not a coward to be frightened by a childish threat!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRY FROM BELOW

BEFORE I got ready for the night I was to have yet a fourth warning against going to The Shadows and it was written upon the sheet torn from the pad, the same pad, I was certain, that my grandfather had used for his last message to me.

The paper was gray and flaky and at the top of the sheet were the little streaks of purple-stained glue. I surveyed it with curiosity and shock; I read: "Nero lives. Leave Philadelphia." It was signed "Friend." And I remembered, of course, seeing that pad in Tony's hand, my grandfather on his deathbed, the doctors, poor weeping Alice, the whole unhappy melange that started the new life for me, which I felt I must travel alone.

I went to bed with renewed contempt for Tony in my heart. And with the decision to go to The Shadows in the morning, more than ever fixed.

THE SHADOWS was aptly named. It was an old square, clapboard house that many years before had been painted a dismal gray. In the middle of its four-sided, sloping roof was a small square tower that was a mass of odd and absurdly shaped windows; diamond shaped they were and once, I suspect, they were thought to be decorative. Across the front of the house, a narrow, high porch had been added and on this was a seamed tin roof which had been painted a liver-red and stained by the railroad which ran so close—indeed, across a corner of the ground which had once belonged to the vast estate.

The grounds, which comprised many acres, showed the lack of love which was in those tenants who could see the creep of rack and ruin. There were bushes that needed trimming,

that sprawled; there was dead wood everywhere. The many pines, which surrounded the house itself, were thinned and filled with browning patches. The old high stone wall, which marked the edge of the domain, was falling to pieces. Stark ruin everywhere!

An old summer house was down in a hollow to the east of The Shadows. Many shingles were gone from its sloping roof; others were curled and warped. An ornate bird house that had once been a proud apex of the high, peaked roof was now canted to one side at a perilous angle, and it lent to the flaking old structure the tipsiest of attitudes.

The leaves of many autumns had collected in the summer house upon the floor, which was a mass of rotting, wet wood. And of all the landmarks of The Shadows, perhaps none was more characterisic, more a pattern of the unchecked desuetude, than was this dismal relic of what had once been a smart addition of a "fine place."

Back of the main house itself was a brick garage which, in contrast to the house, looked glaringly, daringly new, but which was in reality older than the average garage. Near this was a long-unused well that had been covered; a neglected garden sprawled where it would, now showing only in brown, pithy stalks and paths of uneven edges.

ON the day of my start for The Shadows, Mr. Stewart's chauffeur, a bland-faced, blond boy, called for me at ten. And he frowned as he closed the motor door and his frown perturbed me, since his face was not the sort to make frowning easy. But, I imagined, he felt he was being worked too hard, or something of that kind, usual to servants, so I sat back and forgot him as we made our way toward a section of the outskirts where my world said, "No one but the Stewarts live nowadays."

This was, of course, not true, but "no one" whom my world knew, save the Stewarts, did live in that direction. Those who did live there made the section shabby and crude; and they told, with garages, cheap roadside eating-houses and cheap shops, of the changes in "fashionable location" that are made by whims and time.

When the motor in which I rode turned in between the crumbling gates, for the first time since my decision to make the venture, to go to The Shadows to work for Mr. Stewart, my heart sank. I was oppressed absurdly and beyond reason. I found myself swallowing hard, breathing deeply, making every effort to aerate lungs that would remain sodden. The desolate look of the place, I imagined, made this feeling. Certainly the scene that was before me would not make for cheer!

A BLOCK ahead, and upon an unkept rise of ground, stood the shabby, sad, gaunt old mansion; and about it, the dying trees seemed to mourn. Looking at them from the gates, I almost heard the wind in them; a weary, dreary plaint I was to learn too well! I remember I shivered.

When we stopped before the house itself, I saw from behind one of the narrow, tall black windows Miss Janette Stewart peering at me. When she saw that I had seen her she dodged as if she had been shot, and the window seemed blanker and blacker than ever.

The chauffeur opened the motor door. I stepped down. Suddenly, after a look toward the house, he thrust a bit of paper toward me.

I took it with a surprise which I revealed, and holding it without any attempt to conceal it, I read the message on it, and then I tore the paper

across and I dropped it upon the path. Again I suspected Tony Steele's or Felicia Stewart's touch. On the paper had been written: "Unsafe to stay."

I saw the boy whiten and I saw him stoop to retrieve the two pieces of paper that I had made of one. Then Alice opened the door to me—Alice, who was smiling.

"Oh, Miss Anne," she whispered (I was to learn that the house had the power of making one whisper), "it is that good to see you! I am that glad you have come!"

I thanked her as she closed the door and put the hall into its usual mood of eternal gray and gloom.

ALICE took my coat from me and asked me whether I wished to go upstairs before I joined Mr. Stewart. I said "No," and added with a little smile, and some pride, that I was ready to work. This, to my surprise, touched Alice. "I'm sure, Miss Anne dear," she whispered, "I wish you didn't have to be doin' no work; it hurts my heart to have you have to! It does that!"

I said a "Nonsense!" that I hope was reassuring, but Alice, taking me from the new world back into the security of the lost, old one, did make me uncertain for the moment. I turned, in my hunt for composure, to look from the window, as I stripped off my gloves.

Suddenly I forgot the view and my own misery, for on one of the many panes, and the lowest one, was a great blotch of smeared blood that looked wet. It horrified, fascinated, and sickened me. I could not look away. As I was staring at it I heard: "That pane was broken. The man who set this one in, cut his hand." It was uttered, this statement, in a perfect monotone, and in an undertone too. Yet I jumped. Turning, I saw Felicia Stewart.

I said: "Oh! Good morning!" She made no response. Why, I wondered, was the putty around that hideously smeared glass old and crumbling, if a new pane had been set in? Of course her statement was a lie.

Then with amazing quickness, from the darkest shadows of the hall, appeared a man who came consistently from the shadows I was sure. He had a foreign air that was made by his leanness and his brown skin and by his uptilting, waxed, too dapper mustache, and his black, black eyes which roved over me—head to foot—in a way that made me flush. I immediately shrank from him.

Felicia spoke. "Don't tell my father that anyone was with me," she ordered.

It was the sternest sort of order I had ever received, and with it she gave to me the most threatening of looks. Except for my level glance, I made no reply. My chin may have been raised by my contempt for her; I knew I felt contempt. Her cheating an indulgent and a blind father seemed to me too easy a game to play with any sportsmanship.

"This way, please, Miss Anne," said Alice in a nervous undertone. I followed her gladly.

MR. STEWART'S sanctum, and the room in which I was to do most of my work, at first appalled me. It had been designed to hold books, but now, on every shelf, stood rows of small, evilly grinning, or tranquilly smiling, or utterly serious gods. As I first paused within their domain, I felt they were all looking at me, estimating me, threatening me.

"Mr. Stewart," I said, as he struggled to his feet and turned his face toward the sound of my voice, "it's absurd, but your tenants have frightened me!"

"They have a power, my dear," he conceded, "but remember, it comes

only from within you; through your handling of them, and not from them alone. Come here, child, and let me shake hands with you. I am so happy—so very happy—to have you here!"

He took both of my hands in his. "Are you smiling?" he questioned.

I answered with "Yes."

"I want you to," he said, and wistfully. "I have need of happiness in this house!" and his voice shook as he stopped speaking.

LUNCHEON was quite the most dreadful function I have ever lived through. Miss Janette Stewart, who was Mr. Stewart's junior by a good many long years but who seemed old by reason of her unbreakable chill, acknowledged my presence by a curt nod. Felicia gave me no greeting. Hale Stewart, whom Mr. Stewart had adopted soon after his wife ran off, it was said, with a lover, came to the table with bleared eyes and he brought with him a pervasive odor of bad whiskey.

Alice and a sour-faced, thin maid of fifty or so waited upon the table. The room was strangely dark and even the old, heavy hangings which almost covered the tall, narrow windows, seemed infused with the general repression and the balked hate that seethed beneath the silence.

Mr. Stewart tried to make talk. His voice, at only normal pitch, seemed a shout in the eerie stillness. Before me on a teakwood table stood a large Buddha. The eyes were of highly polished stones and they seemed to twinkle a tale of wickedness and to hint at power.

It was difficult for me to avoid looking at that Buddha, and I began to know, as the meal progressed, that it was quite as difficult for Hale Stewart to avoid looking at me, in a speculating, unpleasant way.

Felicia watched Hale and me, and altogether I had the strange and unpleasant sensation of a cat and mouse game. Of course, I reasoned, it was absurd. Yet to be studied so mercilessly does make one nervous, awkward, jumpy.

Once my unsteady fingers let my fork clatter on my plate and my "Sorry," sounded, in that dreadful stillness, as if it had been screamed. I wondered, if this were a pattern for all the meals, how I could survive them.

The food was as good as that to which I had been accustomed; and I had known the result of careful cooking and lavish buying; but I did not realize the flavor of what I ate until I made it myself. The atmosphere was chilling, absorbing, and it numbed me.

The meal dragged. Alice and her gaunt, elderly companion were, to me, maddeningly slow in their change of plates, the passing crackers, cheese, bar-le-duc. But at last they had gone from the room; only small cups of coffee were left to be finished and I began to be conscious of a rise in spirit.

A moment, I realized, and I would be free from the speculative eyes of Felicia and Hale Stewart; and done, for the time, with being ignored by Miss Janette, who sat, proud and rigidly still, at the foot of the table.

Then, in the midst of my feeling of a sentence almost served, came a sound which stopped my heart and turned my hands cold and damp. I sat, breathless, strained, horrified. Listening! Listening!

CHAPTER V.

THE GOD WARNS

I HAD heard a moan, a moan that seemed to come from directly below my chair; a weak, long, whining moan, which to my inflamed imagination rose from the ut-

most of pain and made a petition for mercy.

Mr. Stewart started: "What was that?" he questioned in a hushed, frightened voice. For the first time during the meal, Miss Janette spoke.

"The wind moans so today in the trees," she said in the utter monotone I had heard before from Felicia. And she stared, as she said it, as if hypnotized, at the Buddha.

"It didn't sound as if——" Mr. Stewart began uncertainly.

Felicia broke in: "Father is right, as usual," she said with a scathing sarcasm; "the noise was not the wind moaning in the trees." She paused to sip her coffee, smiling unpleasantly. "The noise," she went on, after what seemed a very long interval, "was made by Gypsy, one of the dogs who is littering. I think Ditridge has her in the furnace cellar."

There was a heavy pause; my hands grew colder, damper, for I knew. I knew!

That noise had not been made by any animal. It was a human sound and a hideous one for a human to emit. I tried to drink my coffee and I had to give up; my hands shook too much to raise the small cup.

After my ineffectual effort to sip the black fluid that would do something, I knew, toward steadying me, I happened to glance up and into Felicia's eyes.

She was pleased by my perturbation; that I saw. There was a malicious triumph on her lean face, and upon her hollow, ivory cheeks was as close an approach to color as I had ever seen.

I looked away from her quickly and at Hale Stewart, who was staring down at his plate and trying not to smile.

Miss Janette said loudly, almost happily, "I stepped out this morning, and really, it seemed more like April than November. There was quite a softness in the air."

Why, I wondered, chilled and frightened, were they all so elated by that moan? Why did not Mr. Stewart realize, with me, that no animal had made that sound. What was below me? In the dark—in the cellar below me?

AS WE stood up—I not quite steadily—Mr. Stewart said: "Felicia, will you show Miss Belmont to her room, please?"

He waited as if expecting her to refuse; his face, strained and anxious, turned in the direction from which came to him her voice.

"I suppose I shall have to," she answered him, in a loud, rough voice.

"Alice would be glad to, I'm sure," I put in quickly, but she silenced me with a still louder, "This way."

I followed her, through two dreary, darkened drawing-rooms, across the even darker hall, and up the narrow stairs that were steep and long, for the ceilings were immensely high even for so old a house as was The Shadows. Then we traversed the upper hall and turned from it into a small corridor that led toward the front of the huge house.

Felicia paused before the second door of this. "You will see," she said, and without any show of feeling, without anything but the drear, gray monotony which was so often in her tone, "you will see this corridor may be shut off from the main upper hallway and locked. But anyone could escape from any of these front rooms, by creeping across the porch roof and climbing down one of those absurdly notched pillars. My brother has done it."

"I think I shall hardly need to," I answered with a little heat. I did not tap wood and I thought: "You fool, do you think you can get rid of me by such childish hints?"

I had never felt for anyone such scorn as I felt, at that moment, for her. She opened the door that led to my room without another word, but she raised her shoulders and her brows at one time and as if to say: "Well, I've done my part!"

"The bathroom is there," she said, pointing toward a door across the room, "and the cupboard is by the fireplace; if there is anything you need, you can ring for one of the servants."

I thanked her because I had to. My "Thank you" sounded that way. For me, she had completed her necessary duties as my hostess; we had no love for each other's society, I knew, and still she lingered. I waited, wondering; stiffly hostile and, I imagine, showing it. "Of course," she said, smiling a travesty of a smile at me—a ghastly travesty of a smile it was!—"of course you will sleep with your windows open?"

"Why naturally," I answered. I was surprised at her question and I made no effort to hide my surprise. She moistened her lips and looked at the windows; toward those that looked over the low ground in which huddled the dilapidated summer house, and those which gave upon the roof.

"The windows to the east," she said in a sweet tone that was plainly synthetic, "sometimes stick if they are raised. It would be better, I think, for you to open your windows that are over the porch." And again she smiled brilliantly and her eyes gleamed.

"If this is a thieving neighborhood," I pointed out, I thought rather cleverly, "it would be easy for anyone to get in those windows that are over the porch roof. If the pillars are easy to slide down, they would certainly be easy to ascend?"

"We have a watchman," she said, "who parades the grounds at night. You need have no fear of thieves, I think."

I wondered what she was trying to say. For a moment more she lingered and then she left with a lingering "Well," that seemed a compromise with her balked intention. I watched her opening my door and shutting it after her. Never had I seen anything done in a so disturbingly stealthy, hushed manner. She had evidently had much practice in that dubious art of doing things silently.

Again came one of those eternal "whys" which seemed a part, an integral part, of my new life and days.

ALONE, I surveyed my new quarters carefully; absorbing detail with the hope that it might still the echo of that moan which had seemed to rise from below my chair; hoping, too, that I would reach my old balance and sanity through the anchorage of the material, the diversion that one may find through things. But I was not helped.

Every part of the room was depressing. The walls, years back, had been covered with one of those leathery, heavily stamped papers in a dark magenta. I knew my eyes, whenever undiverted, would follow the tortured pattern.

The furniture was of scrolled black walnut in immense, clumsy pieces. The carpet, which was an ingrain and of a brilliant green, ran to the edges of the floor where it was tacked, I learned later! The bed-head left a triangle of space back of it.

The fireplace, surrounded by black marble, further depressed the room. There was a table near a window with writing materials on it. At the windows were stiffened, old-fashioned lace curtains which were tied back with cracking cerise ribbons.

And in the center of the bureau stood three of the eternal trophies of Mr. Stewart's unending chase! This

time they were Brahma, Vishnu, Siva; the trinity they were which speaks of the temples in India, and of ideas of life and death and worship which differ from ours.

I unpacked, hung my clothes in the capacious cupboard, and laid such small belongings as I had brought with me on the table and bureau. Then, since Mr. Stewart had told me he would not need me until four, I sat down by the window to think.

The only things which had contributed to my unpleasant and too real feeling of alarm, I reasoned, were the hints that were probably given by selfish reasons. Felicia didn't want me in her house; nor did Tony.

It was absurd, I decided, even to remember these warnings. Doubtless the chauffeur, too, was the agent of Felicia or Tony; but Mr. Stewart was my father's friend and my grandfather's friend and he was giving me employment while I learned the ways that would enable me to find employment when I must leave him. Surely, there must be some sane explanation of that moan; I would do my best to locate it.

Meantime, I would realize that it was the Twentieth Century and that even though Felicia Stewart would like to cast herself for the role of a modern Lucrezia Borgia, she could not do this when the police were within hail, with servants and her father watching. I had been absurd I thought again and smiling.

I thought of Mr. Stewart's many kindnesses to me and they so softened my mood that I almost gave way to tears. I was more deeply touched then by kindness than by hurt; kindness was the more rare.

WHEN I went downstairs at four I was thoroughly myself. So much my usual, normal self, in fact, that I made no effort to soften the sound of my step. The house, up to that moment, had so imprinted upon me its dominant mood, an eery repression, that I had unconsciously tiptoed. Now, I decided—brave and gay—that was done! I hummed as I traversed the lower hall.

Mr. Stewart, after my bold, loud tap on his door, called a warm "Come!" and I went in to find him with worry on his face.

"Anne, dear child," he said, "come here and help an old man to solve a difficulty."

"Surely," I answered, "and with so much pleasure, if only I can!"

I settled near him and he spoke to tell me that the cook was subject to epileptic seizures; he feared she had had one that noon. Had the noise sounded to me like wind in the trees? Or a dog?

I had to admit that it had not, and as I did, my spirit lifted. What fools humans were, I mused, to make of the least material the greatest sensational event! What that moan had done to me made me ashamed, even while it brought out my smile, and brought to me entire relief.

Well, he went on, he felt it was not safe to have her around the stove. But Miss Janette liked her and, as was sometimes the way with soft women, Miss Janette had a stubborn streak and she was resolved to keep the cook, a woman of nearing sixty, Mr. Stewart said, instead of sending her away on the pension she had earned. "It worries me," he ended frankly. "I think, for her safety and our safety, she should be retired."

"It would seem so," I said.

"I'm the least bit deaf," he went on, "some days more deaf than on others, and I'm not always quite certain of what I hear, but today that didn't sound like a dog to me, and I fear it was old Esther."

Alice tapped on the door then to tell Mr. Stewart that one of the Phil-

adelphia art dealers wished to speak to him at the telephone which was in the hall. He got up quickly, and Alice, smiling, led him from the room. "He can't have that Burma Temple good! It can't be that, that would be too, too good!" Mr. Stewart murmured as he left me, and murmured tremulously.

Alone, I moved along before the shelves; first smiling at one small pudgy face; then turning rather quickly from another. The variety of expression was remarkable, I thought, as I inspected the tenants; remarkable when one considered that they were made of wood alone.

I paused as I thought that before a huge ebony fellow with open mouth, who had been dignified and set apart by having his own pedestal. Then suddenly the room swam before my eyes, for I heard in a wailing, weak note which suggested the tune I had already learned, that tune made by the sweep of the wind in the old and dying trees, "Miss Anne! Miss Anne!"

Incredibly drawn out it was; amazingly weak, yet clear. I listened, strained, but no further sound came save that which was made by Mr. Stewart's moving in the hall. His telephone talk was done, I realized, and his threatening return had evidently silenced the voice. I clung to the back of a chair, glad that Mr. Stewart could not see my pallor and my unsteadiness.

"It was that Burma Temple god!" he said happily as Alice led him toward his chair; "I can't quite believe it, but Demeyer says he has it for me! I've searched so long for such specimen," he ended as he settled.

I picked up the catalogue from which I had been reading to him, but before I could begin Felicia Stewart appeared. She paused in the doorway and I was, for a moment, diverted by the strain on her face.

"Esther's dead," she said metalically, loudly. "She was in Philadelphia this morning to see her dentist and she was run over at a crossing. She didn't get in for luncheon, but I never thought—I never thought—of anything like this!"

Esther dead. Killed in Philadelphia that morning. Who had moaned? Who had just spoken? What was below?

(*To be continued.*)

The Saving Grace

It is not often that a ghost forsakes its accustomed haunts and wanders so far afield as a modern hotel. A lady saw one in a Boston hotel in 1890, however.

Leaving her room one morning meaning to go out, she hurried along the corridor to the elevator. The door was open and she was just about to step hastily into the car, when she saw a man stand in front of her. This made her halt, and all at once she noticed with a shudder that the car was not there and she was confronted by the gaping shaft only.

She raised her eyes to look at the man and thank him, but to her utter amazement there was no man there. By no means could he have moved away without being seen or running into her.

When she recovered her self-control she concluded one of the inhabitants of the Borderland had stepped out of it to save her from a horrid death.

Queer

By RALPH E. MOONEY

THERE is no telling what will happen on the queer side of life. Which is saying that when things are queer you cannot predict how queer they will be. A man who could nurse hatred over a defeat for more than twenty years would be called peculiar, at least. And he might figure in strange happenings.

Chester Dare. That was his name. He put his mind on the fact as he walked along Jacinto Street, surveying the noses of automobiles that stood at the curb like pack-animals at a picket line. He was Chester Dare and practically everyone on the street was aware of him. Some turned to look after him and some nodded. Even the salesmen who flocked in and out of that southwest railroad centre had come to place him as one of the town's upper-twenty.

He was proud of his bulk and his height and he presented a smile as he walked for he was known as a wit and a boisterous fellow. He was sitting on the world as far as this man's town was concerned; as far as every town in the county was concerned.

He was always flitting about on Booster Caravans and Trade-With-Your Nabor pilgrimages, riding in T. O. Wilson's Packard at the head of the procession. He was always introducing someone to an audience or being perfunctorily introduced. So the county knew him.

"Yoh, Chet! What's the good word?"

Bun Werner of the Fashion Store! Quick now, he must be answered.

"Yoh, Bun! Keep smiling."

Bun Werner guffawed and Chet Dare passed on. Werner was all right, Chet estimated. It made a man feel good to hear a laugh like that. Good glory, didn't he feel good anyhow! Well-being flowed through his veins with the suavity of champagne. He was a machine that was working at one-hundred-percent capacity. He felt perfect. He felt great.

He turned his smile into Jane Street, noting for a moment the new stone front of the bank. Although it was not yet summer, the noon-time glare made the carved lintel a steel etching in white and gray. He caught a distant glimpse of the city hall. The trees were blowing on the plaza and the flag was fluttering. The city swam in sunshine.

Now, the Deer's Club. Buff brick, with stone trimmings. Awnings with violent Roman stripes. Glimpses of fawn-colored cord about the windows. Big screen doors with polished fittings and cool shadow beyond. It was a shame the town only had one club. They ought to have a nice City Club or an Athletic Club.

DARE left his hat on the shelves outside the dining-room. Edgar Purl's straw, decorated with a blue and yellow band, made him chuckle. Old Ed had gone color crazy. He must remember that hatband the next time he was toastmaster at a Civic Luncheon Club razz meeting. Now! Head up, keep smiling.

Into the dining-room.

From right and left they smiled

and spoke to him. Jimmy Matlack, with a salesman to entertain. Joe Peters, who served with him on the publicity committee for the County Shouters. Half a dozen other committee-mates. Bill Bird, the manager of the telephone exchange. Old Busy Bill, the man that knew how to give service.

"Gee whiz," thought Chester, "I'm chairman of more committees in this town! And I know more people!"

There was his regular table and Tulip Ray, his regular companion. Ray sprang to his feet and they had a rollicking struggle to slap each other on the back. The struggle was a daily event. Whoever was slapped first paid a dime.

"What's good today?" asked Dare, when peace was restored and he had adjusted his nose glasses to look at the bill of fare.

"I tried the filet of sole, but I got a hunch the pot roast is better."

Dare ordered pot roast and blueberry pie and removed his glasses to smile at Tulip. Again he was thrilled with his personal fitness. He was king of them all today. Confident? Nobody in the world could outmatch him.

"What you know?" he asked.

Tulip turned serious.

"Gee gosh, isn't this terrible about Purcell Whitney?"

SOMETHING went ping! at the back of Dare's head. It was as if there was a little spot of hot energy at the base of his brain that could send a shock all over his body. But his smile did not change. He knew it. After a moment, he clucked in a perfunctory way, the correct way when the atrocities of the daily news are being discussed.

"Yeah, who'd ever think of anything like that happening to him? I wonder what was back of it?"

Tulip shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord knows! Did you read where they found him? At the bottom of that old concrete oil tank in section 4-19-12."

"Right near the edge of town."

"Yes. I remember when they put that up. It was the one that cracked and was a failure. They had to order a metal tank in a big hurry the day the well came in."

"That old well has been dry a long time. Nobody's been near the lease in at least two years."

"More than that," corrected Tulip. "They disconnected the pump in summer. Nearly two and a half years ago. Well, what gets me is there were no especial marks on him. A few bruises that made it look like he'd fallen in there."

"He might have fallen in."

"A man all dressed up in his dinner coat go wandering over a deserted lease and fall in a tank? And leave his car parked on a road away out on the other side of town? Not a chance, Chet. Somebody put him there and he died of starvation, they say. The sides were too high and too smooth for him to get out."

"Gosh, that's horrible. D'you suppose they'll ever find who did it?"

"I don't know. The way the police do in those cases is look for a motive. You might think it was robbery that some of these loose niggers did. I said that right away. But all his jewelry and money was on him. His watch, too."

The hot ball of energy twinged again.

"Well, they'll never find a motive in this town. Everybody here was Purcell Whitney's friend."

"That's what makes it hard to figure. He didn't travel much either. He was hardly ever out of the city."

Both shook their heads in a baffled way. Jeff Norton came over to their table.

"Talking about Purcell?" he asked.

"Gee, that case is a knockout, isn't it?"

"How long is it now since he was missing?" asked Dare.

"Just exactly three weeks. I wonder what in the dickens is behind that case? Say, you know, there's only one thing I can think of. It wasn't like Purcell at all, but he must have been fooling with some girl, see? He must have took her out there and her brother or somebody caught them and put him in there. Or else he tried to run and fell in."

Dare shook his head.

"By thunder, I hate to think it, but it must have been something like that. Wow! Here it is time for the publicity committee to meet."

He hurried away. He was feeling grand once more. The committee meeting was just ahead and then he must go back to the office and get the papers ready for the Bullock lease on section ten. That would take until five o'clock. Then he would dodge back to the club for a swim and then run home. Tonight the Ways and Means Committee of his lodge would hold a meeting—which would end in the bi-monthly poker game.

"He! He! Good times coming. Business as usual, old boy. Take it in high."

THE PUBLICITY committee was breaking up and the telephone in the room was ringing. It was half an hour later than he expected and he ought to be up and hustling, but he wasn't. Instead, he was watching Joe Peters light a cigar and was thinking over an idea that had just occurred to him. This was the idea: it's a funny thing, isn't it, how little you really know about the men you meet?

The telephone was ringing.

For instance, there was Joe Peters. If you spoke to him, he'd look at you and be interested, but what was he really thinking while he talked? What was going on in that head of his? You looked and you saw Joe Peters. You asked him a question and you heard his voice. But you only heard and you only saw what Peters wanted you to see and hear. And all the time, maybe, there was somebody else inside Joe Peters, thinking things out for him and telling him what to do. What was that somebody else like?

Joe Peters finished lighting his cigar and went to the telephone which sat on a little table in the corner.

"Hello? Yes! It's for you, Chet."

Joe put down the receiver, nodded, and went away. Dare was left alone with the waiting telephone.

"Mr. Dare speaking."

"This is York, the chief of police."

"Oh!" The hot spot emitted another tingling charge. "Oh, yes, chief."

"I want to talk to you a minute. I wonder if you could come over to my office?"

"Why, certainly. I'm pretty busy, but I'll come right now."

"Fine!"

Chet Dare found he was perspiring pretty heavily. He wiped his face and got his hat. After a moment, he found himself walking out of the club.

Entering upon a new scene, the street, he threw up his head and smiled. Funny! For a moment, he had not been thinking. His mind had been absolutely blank. And yet his eyes had seen a picture: Purcell Whitney, in his dinner coat, tottering about a prison of smooth, white concrete. Clawing at the walls.

He was smiling and men were smiling at him. The sun was shining. He felt as he always did. Keen, powerful, hitting on all six. Well, he would go now and see the chief. Probably old York was calling in two or three business men to talk over the Whitney case. He must want advice.

OLD CHIEF York was a crabby customer. Dare had seen him two or three times about the extra police for the county fair grounds. York never said much and never came around the club unless sent for. He was uncomfortable at the club, of course, because he was a rather ordinary man. Of pretty ordinary ability, too. There were half a dozen speak-easies running wide-open right now. York must know about them.

Once the chief had tried to make a speech. Dare laughed over the memory. Good glory, that had been funny. He had halted and wandered and turned red. He hadn't put a single one of his points over. Most of the audience hadn't gotten what he was saying at all.

The trees in the plaza were swaying and the flag was fluttering. He found himself walking up under the flag and into another doorway with cool shadows beyond it. Ed Thomas, deputy tax collector, spoke to him.

"What's the good word, Chet?"

"Keep smiling, Ed."

THE CHIEF OF POLICE, small and dumpy and red-faced, was in his shirtsleeves, with vest open and collar removed. There was a smear of brown on his under lip.

"Hello, chief," Chester fished in his pocket and produced cigars. He held a match for the chief. "What's on your mind?"

"Nothing much," said York, holding the cigar in a chubby fist and studying it. "I just wanted to see you."

Dare sat down and crossed his legs. The hot spot was encouraging him. It had set up a steady little current that kept him warm all over.

"Well, on the way over here I got to thinking you probably wanted to talk about this Whitney case."

"Oh!" York nodded. "I did want to speak about that. It's considerable of a mystery, ain't it?"

"Yes, it is. Just at lunch, Jeff Norton was saying that the only reason for it must have been that he was fooling around with some little flapper, some girl, you know."

York interrupted.

"He disappeared on the twenty-third of last month."

"Yes, I know. Well, Jeff Norton figured he must have taken her out there, see?"

"It was at night," pursued the chief, "and he left his house about 8:30 to go get his wife at the country club and he was never seen again—until this morning."

"That's what the papers say. Well, honestly, I couldn't believe a thing like this of Purcell but Joe was saying her brother or somebody must have——"

"Where were you that night, Mr. Dare?"

"Caught them, the brother must have caught them and——"

The spot at the base of his brain glowed sullenly. The chief had asked him where he was the night of the twenty-third. Well now. "Where was I, chief? Glory, I'm on the go so much, I don't believe I could say. Oh, I know. I was at a committee meeting. The committee on ways and means of our lodge, it was. We met in the lodge rooms."

"That was at ten o'clock. Where were you before that?"

"I got there before ten."

"Not much before."

"Say, chief!" Dare's pain was great. "You're not trying to say I could have had anything against Purcell, are you? Why we were friends. Everybody in town liked him. I've served on committees with him and everything."

"I'm asking questions," said York, considering his cigar. "If you can

answer, you've got nothing to worry about."

"Well, chief!" What could a person do with such a man as this? "Well, let's see, I went to dinner at home that night and afterward I went to see Ed Purl for a while. There were four of us there, talking over the student's fund at the High School. From there, I went to the committee meeting."

"You left Purl's at quarter after eight."

Dare laughed and puffed his cigar. Something inside was making a review of necessary points and was reassuring him.

Chester, you're all right. Listen, you left Purl's in your car. You drove by Whitney's house a couple of times as you have been doing for two years, waiting for the chance when everything would be right. And everything was right. Everything.

You saw him drive out alone and you followed him. The road was deserted where you stopped him. Nobody can prove it wasn't an accident. Nobody killed Whitney. He died alone in that tank, clawing at the walls.

He set his teeth in the cigar. He had hated Whitney for years. By God, nobody knew what it was to hate like that. And Whitney had deserved it.

"Dead right, chief. Dead right! I remember now, I left there and drove around town a while. I guess I must have driven for an hour and a half. I went way out toward Hagerstown once. I was thinking."

The chief thrust his head forward. He came gliding over the desk top like a serpent, as if he were endless. His eyes shone furiously.

"You drove until you hailed Whitney. After he stopped, you made him get in your car. I guess you had a pistol. Or maybe you knocked him out and doped him. We know he was doped when he went in the tank because the dope made him sick next day. Well, you took him out there, doped or knocked out and you threw him in. It was a pretty good job all the way around, Mr. Dare. Pretty good. It looked exactly like an accident but—we've got you."

Dare surely felt peppy. He was a hundred percent efficient.

"Oh, chief, listen. I'm all in. I've been doing too much lately. Cut out all this now and let me go. I want to take a run out to the park and sit under the trees."

The chief's head swung from left to right, an unbelievable signal.

"Not now. You're under arrest."

There, the chief had said it. Ready now, answer quick.

"You're delirious, chief. Why, all that is nonsense. You can't arrest me on such an idea."

"I can do it on evidence. I know that your wife had a hypodermic syringe and morphine tablets in the house when she was sick last winter and I know that syringe is missing now. I know you weren't seen anywhere around town at the time he was put in the tank."

"But you don't know I killed him, chief. That's important."

The chief roared.

"Yes, I do!" Then he became very quiet. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dare, but I'm going to have to lock you up on what I know. You remember Whitney was a jeweler long ago, don't you? He began in business that way at the old Elite store on Juanita street."

"Of course I remember that. But, chief, you say lock me up? Why—"

"It was while he was a jeweler that he married Betty Elliott."

"Now, chief. Chief! Don't try to drag up that old affair. He won out and I'd forgotten all about it long ago. Now, chief, by thunder if you mean what you say, I'll sue this city and this department. I'll make you

pay for going wild like this, by thunder."

"Wait a minute! Whitney knew how to engrave on metal pretty well. He learned it as a kid. And anything that's engraved on metal is apt to last. It don't blur and it don't get torn up, does it? All right, then, when you took him over to that tank you did think to take away his notebook and pencil or whatever he had to write with but considering his training you left pretty dangerous stuff in his hands when you forgot to lift his watch and his diamond ring. Yes you did. Awful dangerous stuff."

There was a moment of flaring, searing pain. That spot at the base of the brain had exploded.

"Chief, I didn't take him there."

York opened the drawer of his desk.

"Here's his watch. And here's what he engraved on the inside of the back lid while he was dying. It's easy to read. Easy as print, but it'll last a lot longer than print.

"Chet Dare did this. See him punished, Betty. Good-by."

Chet's voice went bursting from him so that internally he wondered at its vehemence.

"Why that's absurd. You say the man was doped, so you know he was delirious. He may have imagined I had something to do with it. His conscience might have made him think that because he did play me a dirty trick. Awful dirty. But what does all that mean? It's just his word against mine and I know you ain't going to take——"

The chief's right arm went slowly over the surface of the desk and stopped above a ring of keys. The fingers closed upon the ring and there came a faint jingle.

"Come on, Dare. I wouldn't say anything more now. We can have a long talk later."

The chief was opening the door. A solid wooden door which let in a fierce glare of electricity and the tapping of a typewriter. He might run. No, that would be a give-away. They couldn't convict—they never could.

Purcell must have gone round and round, clawing at those walls—no, he had stopped and had sprawled on his face and had worked against time making those delicate little script characters that you would find on every old piece of gold or silver in the city.

The chief was looking at him, studying him. He felt funny.

NOW THEY were in the other room. There were people; a stenographer and a patrolman and Tom Wright, the old turnkey. The colored janitor. They were staring at him too. He began to understand. They were puzzled, trying to figure it out, trying to guess what made him go. They were saying it was queer, all this.

Here was the jail door. Someone was screaming. They shouldn't permit such noise.

Queer. That was what they were thinking. There were two sides to life, the normal and the queer. And he was queer. Chester Dare was queer, not only now but he always had been and no one had guessed it. He always would be.

That fool was screaming his head off. Why the devil didn't they stop him? Stop him! Stop him!

Then he found himself with mouth open and breath drawn in. Oh, good glory! He was the one that had been screaming. He had gone to pieces. They had carried him and had wrestled with him. He had screamed a long time.

Now he was alone in a tiny, oppressive room. He was grinning. It was senseless to grin. It made his face hurt. He walked over and took hold of a pair of convenient bars and tried to look up and down a corridor.

Magnolia

By HAYNES TRÉBOR

A FOG HORN was crying frantically in the channel. It sounded far away; now right at hand; now it was nowhere. Its tones were pitiful: it was like a child lost in a great empty house and sobbing itself hoarse.

The fog stood at the window, looking in at those in the room. It blew its breath against the window panes and made them misty. It was as quiet as a ghost and as curious as death.

In the little shack on the wharf there were half a dozen fishermen. They would have been out on the water now if it were not for the fog; but there's no use trying to fish in a fog.

The shack was used, according to the season, for opening oysters, heading and packing shrimp, and cleaning fish. The smells were mingled now in one stale odor that might turn even a healthy stomach.

In the centre of the room a rickety stove was fired and it glowed red on its belly and smoked and hissed stoically as each *splop!* of tobacco-flavored spit hit its surface. Muddy leather scorched and stank.

Talk broke through the hazy atmosphere now and then; for long periods there was silence. When the fog lifted there would be six vessels in the slip, riding at the ends of dripping hawsers, to be taken out; three were going out to the banks for snappers and when ready the skippers would call their crews with the ships' bells; two were going out to drag for shrimp; one was going in Bon Secour cove to pick up the oysters the men on the oystering barges should have by now.

WHEN the fog lifted! It had been this way for two days; it was worse now than it ever was. But it would lift. Fog always lifts eventually. And when it did they would go out.

The long hours of waiting meant nothing. Patience! These men were trained to wait. They knew that to humor the weather was better than to go crazy trying to change it.

Countless days and nights alone on the sea, wresting a living from the somber green waters of the Gulf and the bay and the sound had taught them that all that mattered was wresting the living. Life slipped by, ebbing away with the tide, happiness passing on silent, unseen ships in the darkness and they did not know that it had gone.

In the end they would be snatched away from the loneliness by the sea and taken to whatever court there is in the sea to judge men. For a day there would be talk on the shore, a slight mentioning of names while the news was fresh. Too many go that way to cause any sensation.

And so these fishermen learn patience. They consume their passion for beauty in a few brief moments. When it has gone they forget about it. Life will harden the tender beauty of the women who love them; and those who have been loved will go away to the sea and leave their sons to comfort their widows.

Death will come as the lifting of

the fog. Life is here now and will be all that it is until the fog does lift. Thus the men sat and brooded, keeping their thoughts to themselves.

I ASKED one old fisherman if all men of the sea were not afraid of fog. I had in mind the poet's conception. The old fellow turned his head and his lifeless gray eyes, nearly closed by the wrinkles of flesh about them, contemplated me for an instant; then he turned back to the smoldering stove. I realized that he was contemptuous.

"No," he said slowly. "No, I reckon not. Fog is kinda bad at times. I reckin I've seen times when I swore at it an' swore at the Almighty fer ever thinkin' o' fog. But tain't no use o' cussin' an' carryin' on. Can ye go outside there an' take yer hand an' push back thet mist? It keeps comin' right back, an' yer hand looks dim an' far away. I've known fog t' play some mean tricks on men, an' I don't reckin nobody particularly likes fog. But——" He spat calmly against the hot metal and his narrowed eyes were basking in the warmth. "Fog has hid a multitude o' sins, I reckin. Sometimes it seems just t' make folks stop fer a time an' look aroun' at what they're doin'; sometimes it stops them from doin' —something. Sometimes it just hides everything an' keeps people from seein' th' things th' Almighty ain't wantin' them t' see.

"No, I reckin fogs is kinda friendly sometimes. . . ."

A PELICAN, all things considered, is a stupid bird. As a matter of fact, he seems to take an infinite amount of pleasure in being as thoroughly stupid as he can. Sometimes it is taken for stolidness or laziness, but this is only one of the fortunate things the bird has to muse over.

Luke was about as stupid as any member of his family. Seeing to it that he was fed a goodly number of fresh fish each day was the summit of Luke's cleverness and ambition. The rest of the time he approached being an absolute nuisance.

He stood now at one side of the room and dozed comfortably with his eyes closed. The string that was tied to one of his legs and also to the leg of the kitchen table was stretched tightly over the distance between the bird and the table. Luke always insisted upon assuming that position. No inducement could cause him to perch nearer the table for his naps; he simply had to waddle to the cord's length before he was content.

Tinsie Denny laughed at him sometimes in her quiet way. Luke was her pet. He had come into her life in such a manner as to create a lot of affection.

He had won his mistress' heart through pity. One day after a squall the girl had been walking along the beach path. She discovered something fluttering about in the tall, course grass and found it to be a pelican. He had crashed against a tree during the wind and was a bit out of joint.

Luke was the only intimate thing Tinsie ever had. She brought him home and tendered him awkward but excited administrations. She felt proud of her doctoring and the cynical, mock-dignified way that Luke looked his gratitude sent warm thrills through her heart.

Difficulties arose in keeping Luke as a pet. For one thing Tom Denny, Tinsie's husband, objected; at least, Tinsie knew he would object so she kept Luke outside whenever he was around. And the second difficulty was Luke himself. He had an inane desire to fly away and this accounted for the length of light hemp rope around his august leg.

LUKE watched his mistress by occasionally opening one eye slightly. The woman was sewing, mending a pair of trousers. Her face was expressionless as she bent over her task; her hands worked stiffly back and forth on the stitches.

Heavy footsteps outside and Luke opened both eyes and pricked his ears intently. The form of a man loomed in the doorway and Tom Denny came into the room. Luke almost decided not to move but he realized the rashness of it and moved; but not before one of the heavy boots the man wore had kicked him roughly. He clicked his beak and hobbled under the table.

TINSIE looked at her husband. Tom Denny was a tall man with shoulders and head so massive that the upper part of his body seemed to droop a little as if over-balanced. He scowled surlily.

"Ain't yu home early, Tom?" the woman asked.

He breathed slightly heavier. "What if I am?" he said. "Got my pants ready, yet?"

"Almost, Tom. I didn't have nothin' t' patch them with."

"Why ain't yu got them ready?"

"Yu ain't in no hurry fer them, are yu?" The eyes of the girl showed dull weariness that was no longer physical; it had seeped through, gone deeper and deeper like an ink stain on a ball of yarn.

"When do yu think I want them?" the man said. "Yu oughta had them ready. Yu ain't got nuthin' else t' do 'roun' here, looks like yu could patch a pair of pants when I wants them."

"I had t' wash this mornin'." was the answer.

Denny swore. "Well, hurry up. I got to have them. I want t' sail on the tide."

"I didn't know yu wuz goin' out t' the banks until tomorrow, Tom." He did not answer for a moment. "Yu didn't tell me yu'd changed yu mind and wuz goin' today."

"I'm hungry. Got anything t' eat here?"

Tinsie shook her head. "Ain't nuthin' cooked."

Sour temper rose in her husband's face. "Don't yu ever have nuthin' 'roun' here? I ain't never come home yet an' got what I wanted."

"I didn't know yu wuz comin' home, Tom."

"Git me somethin' t' eat. An' hurry up, too. I only got an hour before the tide changes an' the crew is on board now."

"There ain't nuthin' here but some turtle eggs. Want me t' make an om'let?"

Denny snorted. "I don't care what yu make. But fix me somethin' t' eat, do yu hear me?"

Silently Tinsie went to the charcoal stove and started a fire. Tom Denny watched her prepare the meal, sitting at the table and glaring morosely, impatiently.

Some few minutes went by. The charcoal stove was not burning well. It is a slow fire, anyway.

Luke, the pelican, got tired and waddled to the end of his leash again and dozed. Denny's gaze fell upon him and he flushed.

"What yu keepin' that pelican in the house for?"

"I just had him here fer a little while. I didn't think yu wuz comin' home so soon."

"Doin' things behind my back, ain't yu? . . ." Anger flooded the sullen eyes of the man in an instant. "How long yu goin' t' be fixin' them eggs?"

"Not long. This fire ain't gittin' very hot. My grease is just gittin' hot enough t' cook with."

"Well, hurry up. . . ."

THE GIRL poked some more charcoal into the stove. As she did the wire grating laid over the top to hold the pan slipped; the skillet skidded sidewise and dipped into the fire. Sparks went up, showering ashes over the half-cooked omelet; the part of the eggs that slipped over the edge of the pan into the coals sizzled. Tinsie looked down at it bewildered, unmoving.

Her husband rose and strode hastily, noisily, across the room. He hovered above her, glaring down into the stove at the spoiled food. For a moment there was only his breathing and then his rage took control of him.

With a savage sweep of his arm he clutched the pan, looked at its contents for an instant and then he flung it at his wife. The partly cooked eggs dripped from the bosom of her dress; hot, yellowish grease spotted her shoulder and trickled down her bare arm, burning as it went. A black crescent showed where the pan had touched.

She cried out in pain; and again when her husband's fist struck her trembling lips. The man's words would have hurt the most callous, degenerate creature in the world; and Denny heaped them upon her with all of the venomousness of his distorted soul.

Luke awoke abruptly and tried to comprehend the scene. Unfortunately, in his stupidity, he had insisted upon staying at the end of his taut rope. It was in the way of the infuriated man as he started from the room. With oaths more vile than before he turned upon the hapless bird.

Some moments after Denny had gone, when her senses had somewhat recovered from the intense pain, Tinsie sat on the floor and stroked the limp, bruised neck of the pelican. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. The neck was broken and crushed just at the base of the magnificent pouchy jaw. The rope lay slack on the floor and Luke's eyes were tightly closed. . . .

THE MOON was melancholy when it rose from the bosom of the Gulf and pushed its way into the heavens like a swimmer coming to the surface of a pool. The live-oaks were in sympathy apparently for great gray tears of Spanish moss hung from their branches.

Magnolias burst their delicate buds and the petals fell into the black, smelly ooze along the bayou's edge. The frail flowers became stained, and, ashamed of their ruin, they let the water carry them away, half submerged in its opaque depths.

On the bank the girl was watching, her mind brooding in a half conscious way. So many things she did not understand. Dimly she realized that she had missed something. What it was she did not know.

Her thoughts had never gone beyond a certain vain, sordid existence. Life was set in meagerness of living day after day, accepting things that were meaningless because they were all that she had been told.

The pain from her burns had almost vanished. She had forgotten it long ago. It was really as something that had been there always; somehow the pain did not matter. Like a dull knife the pain failed to penetrate, only scratching the flesh.

Pain had been the lot of Tinsie since she had married Tom Denny slightly more than a year ago. That Denny should beat her seemed not unnatural. She had learned that nothing was unusual—it was only a part of that dull vacantness. Suffering had become a part of life itself; she no longer minded.

Yet uncomprehended thoughts awakened in her mind. The loveliness of the moon, the sweetness of the magnolias seemed to touch on the

wounds and make them smart. Tinsie wondered why the magnolia petals, so refreshingly fragile and creamy white on the tree, became so brown and lustreless when they were crushed in the hand. Or when anything just touched them, all of the subtle fragrance would go, too.

OFTEN when her husband was away on his fishing schooner, Tinsie would break a stem containing a partly opened magnolia bud from the tree and stick it in her hair. The flower would make the curls in her brown hair more noticeable, the wistfulness of her eyes more pronounced; most of all the sharp lines of her face would be softened. She then appeared beautiful, alluring. Ordinarily she just showed faint promise, a sparkle of attractiveness that could be caught only if the observer was very patient and careful in his observation.

Even at that Tinsie Denny was one of the best-looking girls in the fishing villages of Bayou de la Coden and Bayou la Batre. If you can imagine the magnolia at the instant it bursts into full bloom you have a picture of Tinsie. Only magnolia blooms fall apart very soon.

Marriage had been as inevitable an event in her life as a squall or a fog or any other phenomena that enters the lives of the people along the coast. Tinsie realized that it was a natural, if not a necessary state. And so she married Tom Denny.

In the bayou country marriage lacks much of the formality it possesses in more sophisticated centers. A girl, not being adept at earning her own living, is married off as quickly as possible. She had better be a drudge for a young man, cook his food and bear his children, than remain idle at home.

Then, too, a girl wants to get married as soon as there is an offer, lest the moment of beauty be whisked away and she no longer be able to bring that eager look to the eyes of a man.

Worldly possessions determine whether the match is good or not. Tom Denny owned one of the neatest, fastest sailing, fishing smacks in the waters near Mobile. Folks thought the match of Tinsie and Tom a fine one and then thought no more about it. No one cared that Denny was cruel, had a violent temper, or that he beat his wife. And Tinsie never thought of leaving him. It did not occur to her.

ARROGANT, brutal, Tom Denny followed in the examples of his hard-lipped, heavy-eyed, dull-brained forefathers, and, like them, smashed his way through life with hatred of everything in his heart and a bitter curse on his lips. Tom's fists hung at his side like two squat anchors from the cat's head of a ship; it was generally known that much of Tom Denny's prosperity was the result of those hard fists.

Denny's philosophy included his wife and the rest of mankind with no discrimination. Soon the mighty paws were squeezing the magnolia bud, crushing. Some of the scars on Tinsie's body seemed almost to be permanent.

NORMAN LEE met Tinsie along the bayou bank one day after Luke's death. Tinsie was on her way to the store in the village. She had stuck a magnolia bloom in her hair and the sharp sea breeze blew against the girl as if eager to embrace her supple body and to caress it with untamed passion.

Norman was short and stocky in build; beside the girl he was massive, his full, sordid features contrasting with the girl's like the rigging of a

square-rigged clipper ship with the slender, naked-rigged masts of a schooner

The man spoke, bruskly, adequately, one uninflected word. The girl did not smile in answer.

"Hello," she said.

His eyes moved over her form intimately and revealed nothing. She waited for an instant and then said:

"Tom's home."

Lee nodded, and moved away. She saw his figure pass among the trees along the bayou and then turned into Tom's home and hers—because she belonged to Tom.

Norman Lee talked with Tom Denny's wife again. She saw him occasionally—in the village, on the fish wharf; a few times on the bayou bank. He came once or twice to see her husband about some matter. But the meetings on the bayou bank became the most frequent.

Lee never explained why he happened to be there. Tinsie did not ask. For a time their words were only a greeting. Lee asked about Tom. Eventually he found more things to talk about. Resentment met him in part at first, but that lessened.

There was no conscious reaction in the girl to these meetings. Tinsie did not grasp any sensitive feelings; there were no finesse of emotions. Life in her environment had blunted everything; she knew that she was Tom Denny's wife. Even though he beat her, she belonged to him. The thought of being anything else was beyond her reasoning. Except when the magnolias caused her to wonder dumbly, but even then she could visualize nothing, could conceive nothing for herself.

After a while the girl realized that Norman Lee was trying to be kind and that his sympathy was real. His lazy way of saying things, of thinking deliberately and unemotionally was such a contrast to the loud, staccato bellowing of her husband that the girl warmed to him.

NOW and then she would appear to see something humorous in what Norman had said and the merest flash of a smile would cross her face.

The man would indulge her, stolidly jest with her. She liked him. She even came to think of how her name would sound. Tinsie Lee! Sounded nice, jingly, like a ship's bell. She just thought of this when she was sure no one could possibly even see her think it.

Lee didn't work steadily. He went out on a boat perhaps once or twice a month. The rest of the time he loafed in the village.

Once when Tom Denny was out on the snapper banks on a week's trip, Norman came to the house.

Tinsie was boiling shrimp on the charcoal fire in the room that wasn't the bedroom of the house. The pungent odor perfumed the immediate vicinity. Lee sniffed appreciatively.

Knocking the door open with his shoulder, he entered. The girl turned quickly, frightened, and stood with the lid of the shrimp pot on one crooked finger and a long-handled fork grasped in the other hand.

"Tom ain't here," she said at last.

The man ejected his lower lip and nodded. "Doesn't matter. Invite me to dinner?"

Tinsie hesitated, waving the fork nervously.

"Like shrimp," the man continued. "Smells good."

Without a word the girl pointed to a chair beside the table. "Want to see Tom?" she asked when several minutes had passed in silence.

"No hurry."

"He won't be back until Thursday."

A nod. "No hurry."

Water was drained from the pot and then the vessel was set on the

table. Beside it was a plate of corn bread. The coffee remained on the stove and simmered, getting blacker and more bitter every minute. Norman drank three cups, but the girl hardly touched that which she poured for herself and her fingers seemed unable to peel the shrimp.

Having finished the meal, Norman locked his fingers behind his head, and anchoring himself with the tips of his shoes, reared the stool upon which he sat back on two of its legs. The girl cleared away the dishes. His eyes followed her meditatively.

AN UNUSUALLY high sea was running. It was not the hurricane season, but blustering winds from a distant atmospheric pocket were tormenting the waters until they were snapping back with short, white-toothed waves. Some of the waves, over-infuriated, would rise up and crash over the close-hauled fishing vessel.

The fog mists that had been hanging over the snapper banks had burst openly into tears, disseminating now in a cold straggly rain. The little smack rode the seas resignedly, dipping and rising and stagggering.

Her master was not in the same mood. It would not have been hard to see that he was in a nasty temper, morose. Instead of hebetating his mind, the bottle of raw "shinny" whisky he had consumed within the hour was burning away the insulation from the nerve cells in his brain, letting those irritated fuses rub against each other.

Tom Denny swore at the weather and told its Maker how much of a miserable failure and other things He was. The catch had been extremely bad; the weather had held up operations; the hold was only partly filled.

Denny had not learned the philosophy of the other fisher-folk, or if he had, it had slipped from him. Instead he had developed hatred; animosity toward everything.

His brutality had forced its way through whatever he had wished it to. He had knocked men about, bullied them, injured them, driven them before him. He had bucked through to what he wanted. But like a great steamer driving through a thundering sea, he found that the driving power of turbines is next to useless, and that the waves can crush, if they choose, the blunt, calloused steel bows that are its fists.

Tom found that the weather could not be bullied, curse it and hate it as he might. The fact rankled, and through his hatred the man lashed himself into a violent rage.

He screamed an order to the man at the wheel and then made his way forward over the careening deck. A piece of running rigging, which no doubt had been secured with seamanly care, had become loosened by the water surging over the side and had been washed out across the deck. Stumbling on half blindly, Denny's feet caught in the line and with a crash he fell to the deck.

IN THE fo'c's'le the men sat about in their oilskins. It was wretchedly cold in the tiny space and it seemed that all of the water had seeped through the bulkheads and the deck overhead as though they were porous. Futilely the men were trying to warm the place with tobacco.

Fred Staples lay in his bunk, hardly resting, but with his face down and his eyes closed. Another man sat on the edge of the bunk beneath him. The two Cambell brothers—Matty, small and bantamy, built with arcs; Clem, tall and full-boned, built with lines and angles—were close by. On a sea chest Chris Ingles was hammering at a buckle on his slicker that didn't work just right.

The door was being opened against the roll of the vessel; when she pitched the other way the door swung swiftly back and banged against the foot of the tier of bunks. Standing in the opening, his long, hard fingers clutching the sides to keep him from losing his balance, was Tom Denny.

His eyes swept over the group, glaring menacingly, savagely, like a hog butcher at a pen trying to pick a victim for his braining mallet. The men looked up, their eyes upon the man in the doorway, themselves obmutescent.

"Which one of you handled that mains'l runnin' gear?" Denny said suddenly.

The men remained mute, indiscernibly defiant, but being unwilling to individually hurl themselves against this man. Denny pushed the door back again when it tried to swing closed. He swayed a bit unsteadily. The edges of his lips sagged.

"Ain't yu goin' t' talk? Git on deck, all hands! Put on some sail so's I can git headway t' make fer home!"

An "Aye, sir," was murmured.

Denny turned and his figure vanished from the opening. The door slammed shut with a sudden jerk of the ship. It was reopened and the men filed out. Matty Cambell went first and his brother followed. Ingles was the third man to reach the slippery deck and he, too, saw all of the incident.

Clem and Ingles saw Tom Denny advance upon Matty, his shoulders hunched and his fists clinched. One of the fists caught Matty full in the face and he went down heavily, rolling with the slanting deck.

The vessel wallowed into a trough and then dove into a gigantic wave. The water broke over her, crashing onto decks, flooding them, and racing on. The vessel quivered, groaned and righted herself. When the scuppers had drained the deck, Matty, the little Scot, was gone. . . . .

The brother rushed at the towering figure of the master and brought up against a bulkhead from the impact of a fist against his jaw.

"I'll—I'll kill yu," he screamed.

Like one who places guarding fingers over the lips of an impetuous and unthinking friend, the wind took the words from Clem Cambell's mouth and scattered them over the troubled sea so that no one heard them.

IT HAS been said many times that the type of men who are the "natives" of the bayou country and who, therefore, are the fisher-folk, will fight quickest over abuse of their dog or their fishing nets.

THE MIST hung heavily over the sea and the broad, sandy beach and the stretches of head-tall beach grass. In the fading twilight the wet gray sides of the sand dunes faded into obscurity and the weeping oak trees were hidden in the gloom. The surf broke with many prolonged sighs and made one feel sober and half thoughtful.

Unmindful of the wetness of the sand, the girl sat stretched out upon it, her hands idly digging. The man beside her was gazing through the mist to the sea. He sat with his legs drawn up and his hands clasped over his knees.

"It ain't safe," the girl said, her tone implying that the sentence had been reiterated again and again. "Tom might hear about us, an'—an' then——"

"Oh! Tom!" the man replied. "He won't do nothin'."

"He'll kill yu."

"I'd like t' see him try it."

"Tom's terrible, Norm, when he's

mad an' upset. An' he hates ev'rythin' just t' be hatin' it. He likes t' hurt people."

"You ain't worryin' 'bout me, are yu?"

Her hands touched something deep under the sand. She pushed the sand away and dragged forth several small, soft round balls.

"A turtle's nest," she said, holding the eggs before him. "Want t' git some an' make an om'let?"

He shook his head. "Naw. Put 'em back an' cover 'em up. Yu can git some when Tom comes in."

"He ought t' be back from th' banks day aft'r t'morruh."

"Yeah, I'm goin' out with him next trip."

Anxiety appeared in the girl's face. "No, Norm, don't yu go goin' out on Tom's boat."

"Why?"

"Cause—cause, yu know how mean Tom is, how he treats his crews. Yu know men've all been sayin' Tom knocked Matty Cambell overboard last trip—an' he was drowned."

"I ain't afraid of Tom."

"Yes, but don't yu go out with him."

"Yu ain't worryin' 'bout me?"

The girl did not answer and her eyes were upon the sand. The question was repeated. Slowly she looked up at him.

"He might hurt yu," she said.

A short laugh. "Hurt me, heh! I ain't afraid."

"Maybe yu ain't afraid, but yu don't know Tom. He'll kill yu!"

"What yu worryin' so 'bout me for? Yu do love me, don't yu?"

Again a short pause and the girl's voice was low when she spoke again. "It ain't safe for us to be together, Norm."

"Aw, why ain't it? Nobody's goin' t' see us. An' besides, nobody would tell Tom."

"Shucks." He leaned toward her, touching her arm with his finger tips. "Yu do love me, don't yu?"

"It ain't right for me to love yu."

"Why ain't it? Why'd yu marry Tom Denny, in the first place?"

"I don't know."

"Yu don't love him."

"It ain't safe," was her answer.

"Yu know yu don't love him. An' he beats yu, don't he?"

For an instant the girl's face was drawn with anguish; her eyes, now hidden from him, were tightly closed, her lips were compressed.

"I'm his wife."

"His wife. Tom Denny thinks a sight more of his schooner and his nets than he does o' yu. All he married yu for was t' have a woman to enjoy when he ain't off fishing and t' cook for him. An' t' keep in practice beatin'."

Her cry of pain halted him. Awkwardly he tried to lift the girl's face and to caress her hair. Instinctively she moved to him.

"Aw, Tinsie," he said, "I love yu. I hate to see Tom have yu an' treat yu th' way he does. Yu love me, don't yu?"

She said nothing. She had allowed her hand to touch his.

"Ain't there no way we can get away from this, so I can have yu?"

The girl's head shook. "No, Norm. I'm Tom's wife, an' yu ain't makin' enough money to take care of us both."

"Oh, I can make th' money, honey. I'm goin' out on Tom's boat next trip."

"No, yu're not. I don't want yu to."

"That's all right. Ain't nothing goin' t' happen."

Her fingers tightened.

"Might," she told him. "Tom hates and he's mean. Why don't yu go up t' Mobile? Yu know all about boat buildin'. Git a job in th' shipyards

there. A good steady job what pays yu good money."

"I don't want a steady job. I can pick up enough 'roun' here t' git along on."

"Maybe somethin' would happen to Tom—an'—an' if yu had a job up in th' city yu could take me up there with yu."

"Yu want t' marry me, Tinsie?"

"It ain't right like this—an' Tom might find out."

"No he won't. Yu quit worryin' 'bout that."

"I'm afraid."

The man drew her a bit closer to him; almost tenderly he held her. His eyes were searching through the mists.

"If Tom Denny ever beats yu ag'in, Tinsie, I swear I'll kill him."

"Don't say that, Norm. Don't say—that!"

She sat up, facing him, distress in her features.

"But I will. If ever he hits yu ag'in, I'm goin'——"

She finally used her lips to silence him. The misty gray had become opaque night.

AN HOUR later she entered her house. Norman Lee had left her beside the bayou and turned back toward the village so that he did not hear her scream . . . .

Hungry, drunk, thoroughly nasty, Tom Denny was waiting for her.

CHRIS INGLES ate the turnip greens and broke corn bread into the "pot liquor." The meat left a shiny circle about his lips. His wife poured coffee from the battered pot.

An ugly gash showed under his eye where the flesh had been mashed against the sharp cheek bone. The wound was partly healed, but poorly dressed. He was telling the creature who poked pieces of wood into the stove how Denny came to hit him while at sea four days ago.

Ingles' cousin, Jake, a lad of fourteen, burst into the room through the back door. He came in without knocking, left the door ajar behind him, and stood before Chris, for a moment unable to summon the necessary words.

"Hello, Jake," Ingles said. "What is up?"

"Tom Denny killed yur dawg, Chris."

"What?"

"Tom Denny killed yur dawg," the boy cried.

"He did? When? Come on, Jake, talk." Knife and fork fell to the table, striking against the plate and bounding away. A spoon fell to the floor. "What'd he do?"

"Old Music," that was the name of Ingles' big hound, "he was down 'roun' th' fish shed where Denny's got his boat docked, an' Music he was smellin' 'roun' th' boat. I guess he was hungry. Th' dawg jumped on board Denny's boat an' stuck his nose in a basket o' snappers that Denny was fillin' t' be took off. When Music just sniffed—I was helpin' unload an' was just comin' back on board with my basket when I saw him—Denny took up a hatch bar an' banged it down on the dawg's head. It just killed Music right there."

The man had risen to his feet so hurriedly that the coffee not only splashed from the cup but from the saucer, also, and ran over the oilcloth table cover, finally dripping over the edge.

Ingles' eyes were glaring furiously. There was one long, deep, forced breath.

"I'm goin' t' kill Tom Denny," the man said.

The woman moved quickly from the stove and came nearer to him. "Yu won't g o h a v i n' a n y more

trouble with Tom Denny, Chris," she cried.

THE FOG horn continued to plead anxiously; occasionally the clang of the bell on the dredge standing off to the south of "42" light in the pass broke through the murky stillness. Fuel was being replenished in the great stove in the centre of the fish shed.

Suddenly the door opened, letting in a louder note from the horn and a cloud of fog which, eager to get into the warm room, became frightened at the red-hot stove and retreated. The woman leaned against the door to close it.

I saw then the fragile magnolia blossom, damp with the mists, already fully bloomed. Some of the petals had been bruised—for there were easily discernible marks on her throat and one arm—I could see the tiny marks of life tragically transforming the peculiar, uncultivated beauty of the girl into the dull, haggard dryness of the woman. Soon that short period of the bud would be gone and then the grimness, the tiredness, the pitiful resignedness to that which makes up life as it is there, suffering.

She was suffering now. Her body sagged wearily and the narrow face was drawn with intense anxiety. A chair was secured for her, room was made by the fire.

"Here, Tinsie, come sit by the fire," old Captain d'Olive said, placing his stiff hands upon her shoulders and guiding her to the seat. "Sit down and get that dampness out o' ye. Ye shouldn't a-come out tonight."

"Has Tom's boat got in yet?" was all she said, but within her all of a woman's emotions struggled for hope, for something to cling to, something to quench the fever whose heat was making the magnolia open wider, and wider, until it almost came to the point of falling to pieces. I felt a great pity for the little creature, and wished that with tenderness and sympathy I could comfort her and save that last bit of beauty until her love had been satisfied.

The men could only tell her that Denny's boat had not been heard from. There was no need to worry, of course; he would probably ride out the fog on the banks. No need to worry.

Worry! Every minute that that fishing smack stayed on the banks this woman would be driven mad by worry. Only the news that would come of the vessel's landing would end it. Think of the two ways that news, whatever it was, could affect her.

AFTER a bit she gave in to the urgings of the men gathered in the shed and said she'd go home. She refused an escort, saying that she would have no trouble in finding the way. In a moment she had slipped out in the fog and that gray apparition watched curiously at the window to see if any of us would follow her.

It was perhaps three hours later that voices halloing outside caused us to rush hurriedly to the wharf. A dory could be heard being rowed by a single pair of oars and feeling its way to the slip. It seemed to have several occupants and they were shouting to us.

Captain d'Olive turned in amazement to find Tinsie Denny at his elbow. He swore a polite oath at her and pronounced himself to be damned when he got no satisfactory answer to his question, "What are you doing here?"

The girl was standing tense, her senses straining through the fog to

communicate with the approaching dory. As if afraid to get an answer, her head was thrown back in forced restraint and I imagined her eyes were closed and her fingers clinched so tightly that they actually pained her.

In the meager light that came from the windows of the shed and that which the lanterns were able to penetrate through the fog, she seemed a slim, wistful figure; hidden was the suffering and one could visualize and feel a great beauty. She *was* beautiful.

I HAVE never had any doubt that she waited outside the shed in the fog all of that time.

Captain d'Olive was raising his voice to a shout.

"Hey, boys!"

An answer found its way back.

After what appeared to be a long time the sound of the rowing suddenly was right at hand and the dory rammed the dock.

"Who's there? Levitte? Cleveland? Eddie? Fred?

Climbing onto the dock, the men returned the greeting.

"Clem—Clem Cambell?"

"Right here, Cap'n d'Olive. We had one hell of a time gettin' in."

"Is that you, Ingles? Hey, Chris!"

"Hello. Grab this line, will yu, somebody. Here I am, Charley."

Had I known all then, I would have expected it sooner: "Norman!" It was the girl.

"Comin'," a voice answered and a shadowy figure leaped onto the wharf and caught the girl.

Captain d'Olive was speaking again. "Where's Captain Denny?"

Several seconds must have passed before anyone spoke. Then, "Tom fell overboard," Norman Lee said.

A moment later I heard the words he said when the girl was being held very close to him.

"Tinsie, honey, will yu marry me, t'night? I've got——" and the fog muffled the rest, or perhaps not the fog.

"Norm, yu — yu didn't — yu didn't?" the girl sobbed.

"Tom fell overboard, honey," was the answer he gave her.

The report is consistently repeated about the bayou country and in the fishing villages that Tom Denny fell overboard. No one seems to know how it happened.

The Painful Tyburn Affair

By BENNET COPPLESTONE

IT COULD not have happened at any other club. The distressing events which I now hold myself free to relate arose out of the position of the ancient home of the Tyburn Club in Piccadilly, an eighteenth century residence built directly over the course of the River Tyburn which still flows beneath its site and always will flow whatever erection in steel and concrete may take its honored place.

The Tyburn, like the Fleet, the Old Bourne, the West Bourne, and the Effra, and many others, both north and south, is one of the Buried Rivers of London.

Man, who can destroy almost anything else, cannot destroy a river. It flows on, placidly defying him. He can divert it or build a tunnel to accommodate it but he cannot obliterate so much as a drop of it.

The Tyburn, upon the pleasant banks of which highwaymen went to their deaths hard by the Marble Arch, still flows under the Dip of Piccadilly—and into the Thames not far from Victoria Station.

SOME TEN years before this story opens the Secretary of the Tyburn Club was taking stock in the deep cellars. Assisted by the wine steward, he was checking the contents of barrels and bins and cases and happened to clear a vast pile of rubbish, the accumulation of generations, out of one corner. In the stone floor thus revealed, he saw a round iron plate fitted with a ring for lifting. It was what is called a manhole cover.

The two men, impelled by mild curiosity, hauled up this iron cover and saw by the lights of their electric lamps the surface of a stream some ten feet below. It was a stream fairly rapid which threw back flickering reflections as they peered down upon it. With a piece of string and a bottle of beer the Secretary sounded the depth of the stream. It was four feet..

"That," said the Secretary, who had studied maps, "is the Tyburn."

He reported his discovery to the House Committee of the day. The members all came down to the cellar to inspect the Tyburn and all felt proud that their Club should have been built right on top of a river so famous in London's history. They duly recorded the discovery in their minutes, but did not tell the other members. House Committees of Clubs never reveal the secrets of their high office—not even in their annual accounts.

THE ORIENTALIST was a person of great eminence, yet an unspeakable bore. Years before he had been elected a member for his eminence and had not developed his boring qualities until it was too late to throw him out.

In a Club such as the Tyburn, which above all things is a society of friends, in which every member is supposed to know every other member, a bore is a much more terrible infliction than in one where a man may be a member for twenty years before being asked to pass a newspaper.

Though the Committee who had elected the Orientalist were all emphatically thrown out at the next annual meeting, the exasperated members had to accept him. He was one of the family and they bore with him even though he might bore them.

In ten minutes he could empty any room in the Club, even the billiard-room after luncheon. In order that this story may be read with understanding and with sympathy, I must emphasize the provocatory fact that as a bore the Orientalist was in a class by himself.

HE WAS excessively learned and he touched nothing which he did not spoil. While Professor of Sanskrit he translated into what he called English some of the most luridly improper and amusing stories in eastern literature, and made a version so dull that all the unholy fire and esoteric vice had been smothered out of it.

That was not the least among his offenses in the view of the eminent and reverend members of the Tyburn Club who had subscribed at large cost to his translation—before they had read it.

The hatred of the Honorary Treasurer surpassed that of any private member. He had purchased out of the funds set aside for the Club Library that bitterly disappointing translation, and he was himself a fluent and consistent talker.

From his favorite corner by the billiard-room fire, an ingle nook rarely invaded even by the newest of new members, he discoursed upon all subjects under Heaven and the uttermost Hell. He was the occasion of good talk in others; he drew them out and made them talk their own shop.

"Every man," he would say sententiously, "has some subject upon which he is interesting, if it be only the wing cases of beetles or the economical disposal of sewage. Every man, that is," he added cautiously, "except the Orientalist."

But good talker though he was the Treasurer fell silent in the dampening presence of the Orientalist.

THIS MAN had a round, soft carcass and a flat, hard, repellent face the color of sour dough. His eyes were totally without sparkle and his ears were more than slightly deaf. He missed the point of every story and failed to perceive humor in the best of jokes.

The utterance of gay persiflage, a speciality of the Treasurer, was impossible with this wet blanket about. Imperfect in hearing, he always, whenever laughter rang out, asked that a jest might be repeated. When it was he did not see it.

The Treasurer always curtly refused to repeat his jokes. "I can't strike sparks out of wet clay," quoth he softly.

You will understand how conversation trailed off and rooms emptied whenever the loud flap of the Orientalist's wide, flat feet were heard approaching. He could be heard two floors off.

IT WAS exactly a quarter past five on one afternoon in January. The Treasurer had come in to attend a meeting of the House Committee at five-thirty. He walked into the billiard-room and found it empty. The hour was too early for the after-daily-work billiard players and too late for the post-luncheon lingerers.

Most of the members of the Tyburn earn their own living and make at least a show of working for it. The Treasurer sat down in his own ingle nook and picked up an evening paper. Just then the well-known ominous flop-flop of the Orientalist's boots was heard outside.

The Treasurer sprang up to flee, but it was too late. The Orientalist was already at the door; an instant later he had entered.

If those dull, fishy eyes of his could have brightened they would have gleamed now. For he admired the Treasurer as much as the Treasurer hated him.

He loved, as much as he was capable of loving anything, to be seen talking with (or at) the Treasurer, a man known to the wide world outside the Tyburn as well as he was known within its tottering walls. Here was a chance, rarely proffered to him, of talking with (or at) the Treasurer, and the Orientalist seized it instantly.

He stood close to the swing door of the room, for he knew from long experience that his victim would maneuver round him and bolt if he did not block the exit. He stood by the door and began what threatened to be a long, weariful discourse on horses. He had just seen one, a rare beast, in Piccadilly.

He talked, historically, of Great Horses and of Percherons; he talked, geographically, of Arab mares and of sires from the wastes of Bokhara. He talked, ethnologically, of mankind in relation to horses through the ages.

All this, as a preliminary, occupied some five minutes, during which the Treasurer stolidly read his evening paper and threw not so much as a single glance toward the Orientalist.

AT TWENTY-FIVE minutes past five the Treasurer arose, tossed down his paper and marched toward the door. The Orientalist stood fatly and solidly in his path and went on talking about horses.

He had reached Section IV—the Horse in Art. As the Treasurer tried to edge past the mountain of flesh which imprisoned him within the room the Orientalist thrust out a large hand and grasped the Treasurer by one of his coat buttons.

The Treasurer halted. He was intensely and momentarily interested. Avid of novel experiences he enjoyed one now.

MANY TIMES he had heard and used the verb "to be buttonholed" in its metaphorical sense. Many times he had been buttonholed (metaphorically) but never before until that moment had the most devastating of bores actually and physically seized him by a coat button.

The moment of interest passed, but the Orientalist held on stoutly. He was on the threshold of Section V—the Horse in Music. The Treasurer tried to shake himself free, but the button, sewed by himself with honest brown silk, held tight.

Then, exasperated, he lost patience and doubling his right hand he smote the Orientalist a sharp jab with his knuckles under the short ribs. Incredible things instantly began to happen.

The Orientalist screamed in agony, one blood-chilling scream which brought the billiard-room waiter flying from his tea. Just one scream. Then the great body of the Orientalist crashed to the floor, almost dragging the Treasurer on top of him—by the button.

Something gave; what it was the Treasurer was too gravely disturbed to notice at the moment. There entered the waiter.

"Henry," gasped the Treasurer, "Mr. —— seems to be ill."

The waiter, who had been a captain (temporary) in the War and was not easily to be upset, walked to the formless bundle of clothes upon the floor and turned the Orientalist on his back.

"He is dead, sir," said the waiter, who had seen many men die in their boots.

"Impossible," gasped the Treasurer, "I only . . ." He broke off; the waiter was looking at him with curious eyes.

"Is there a doctor in the Club?" he inquired quickly.

"I saw the Doctor a few minutes ago," said the waiter.

THE DOCTOR, thus distinguished from the many other medical practitioners who graced the Tyburn with their membership, was one who out of kindness of heart gave his skilful services as a consultant free to members of the staff. So he became the Doctor, none others being accounted.

While the waiter ran off to summon the Doctor, the Treasurer hauled the bloated body of the Orientalist onto one of the leather-covered benches which were arranged round the billiard table. No one came in and none, except the billiard-room waiter, appeared to have heard the Orientalist's expiring yelp.

It seemed a long time to the Treasurer before the Doctor came. He was in the throes of another new experience; he was learning what it feels like to be a murderer.

"He is as dead as mutton," declared the Doctor. "How did it happen?"

The Treasurer hesitated. He saw that he must presently tell the truth, always a painful thing for a humorist to do, but he wanted time to arrange his story properly. Besides, there was present that ear-gaping waiter. So he temporized.

"Come up to the Committee Room," said he hurriedly to the Doctor, "and you, too, Henry. Both of you are in this business up to the neck, but let us keep the rest of the Club out if we can."

"But what about the body?" asked the Doctor. "We can't leave it here."

"If I may make a suggestion, sir," said the waiter, who had been a captain during the War, "I think that we had better dispose of it under the billiard table. There is a deep shadow there and no one will see it."

Between them the three men disposed (temporarily) of the deceased Orientalist by arranging him carefully under the table. They observed uneasily that he took up a lot of space.

"Never mind, sir," observed the resourceful waiter. "He will not be seen unless some gentleman knocks a ball off the table and goes down on his knees."

"You will have to stay here on guard," ordered the Treasurer, "and retrieve any lost balls."

"But I want to hear how it all happened," objected Henry.

"I will tell you later," replied the Treasurer, and with this Henry had to be content. He had just time to get a table napkin and cover the Orientalist's face before two men arrived in the room.

"It is twenty minutes to six," cried the Treasurer, "and I am late for the House Committee. Come along, Doctor."

MEETINGS of House Committees are not exciting as a rule; this one held with the Doctor as unofficial assessor was an exception. All current business was set aside.

There were present: the chairman, who was unluckily a lawyer and quite unscrupulous, a Civil Servant connected with the Home Office, and the Secretary who ten years before had discovered that intriguing man-

hole in the cellar. As an emergency Disposals Board the membership could not have been bettered.

"Of course," said the Chairman, as soon as the Treasurer had told his story on the lines of the most rigid truth—he perceived, upon reflection, that the truth would in this rare instance serve him better than the brightest fiction and gain for him the utmost sympathy.

"Of course," said the Chairman, "we ought to send for the police. But if we do, John here will be arrested for manslaughter."

"But I did no more than tap the man under the lower ribs," objected the Treasurer. "There is no manslaughter in that. Besides, he deserved to be killed; he was holding me by the button and talking about horses."

"We all agree that he deserved to be killed," broke in the Doctor, "but there is no getting away from the manslaughter. The man was treated by me last year. He had, in days past, suffered from malaria in Arabia and of blackwater in Samarkand. His spleen was diseased and as big as a football. A touch would kill him and you, by your own account, gave him a devil of a prod."

"I should say," remarked the Civil Servant judicially, "that you will get away with about seven years. My boss is a friend of yours and may knock off a year or two on the quiet. But seven years it will be in open Court. Bet you two to one."

"Geoffrey," said the Treasurer sourly, "you are a beast. I sit here, a benefactor of the Tyburn Club, and you talk of seven years in prison. I have killed, by accident, the man you have all wanted to kill for years. And as Treasurer, I have astutely destroyed him in January so that the Club will enjoy the unexpired portion of his subscription for eleven months. Still, have it your own way. Send for the police," and he held out his wrists to receive the bracelets.

THE CHAIRMAN scratched his chin. "Has the man any friends? A wife or anything? Brothers or sisters? I know nothing of his private life."

"He couldn't have any," replied the Treasurer. "A wife, or anything, would have left him after a long month. He is too old to have any father or mother alive. The Lord would not have been so cruel as to give such a man unoffending brothers or sisters. He can't have a friend in the world."

"If I was sure of that," murmured the Chairman.

"It is so, sir," put in the Secretary. "He was an only child according to 'Who's Who', and a widower. He has no near relatives and, of course, no friends. He couldn't have them."

"I must say," said the Doctor, "that the resolute act of our respected Treasurer strikes me as highly praiseworthy. We might have had to endure the Orientalist for years and years. He would have ruined the Tyburn. Members were already resigning because of him. Nobody could suppress him. So he had to be killed. I look toward you, John."

"I likewise bows," said the Treasurer, smiling.

"I am not a member of this Committee," went on the Doctor. "If I were, I should try to hush the business up, square the accomplices—Henry, for instance—and simply report the death to the Coroner. But being a doctor and not a member of the Committee, I warn you not to do it. There will be a mark from John's hard dig in that too soft flesh. John is like all other murderers; he is up against the body and evidences of his crime." The Doctor smacked his lips; the Treasurer grinned.

"The body is the difficulty," ob-

served the Civil Servant judicially. "It always is. Nothing is so difficult to get rid of as a human body. We must call in the police and do our best to help John in his defense. I would suggest that we send a whip round and retain Sir Holman Jeffries. He may get the sentence down to five years."

"What it all comes down to is this," observed the Chairman thoughtfully, "if the body which you have hidden, temporarily, under the billiard table could be transported outside this house there would be nothing to connect his death with this Club or with us personally. It would not then be necessary to report to the police and hand over John to be tried for manslaughter. We should be quit of the Orientalist for ever. Now how could that be done obscurely and—safely?"

He looked hard at the Secretary, who smiled in his furtive thin-lipped way. He was not a bit furtive, really.

NOW IT happened that no one in the room except the Chairman—who had been a member of the House Committee—and the Secretary knew of that manhole deep down in the cellar above the buried river of Tyburn. And the Chairman, being a lawyer, wanted the Secretary to suggest the new employment for it.

And the Secretary, knowing his official chief, at once did what was expected of him. He told briefly of that discovery and of the stream flowing briskly beneath their feet.

"I have never heard," exclaimed the Civil Servant (Home Office), "of a Club so admirably suited to the purposes of murderers. It might have been built for you, John. The problem is always the body and here is that problem solved."

"Are all agreed to try the way of Tyburn?" asked the Chairman. "There are small risks if we set about the business with due precautions. No one downstairs knows except Henry and we must involve him fully as an accomplice lest we afterward, and for the rest of our lives, be blackmailed by him. We will wait until all the members in the Club are at dinner and the servants occupied. Then, we who are here and Henry will smuggle the Orientalist down into the cellar, lift the manhole cover, and slip him in. The Tyburn will do the rest. He will probably be picked up in the Thames somewhere. It will be a nice problem for New Scotland Yard—for you, Geoffrey."

"Yes," agreed the Civil Servant, "I can see the headlines. 'Another Unsolved Mystery. Secrets of the Great City.' "

"Quite so," said the Treasurer, beaming as a load of discomfort was lifted from his shoulders. "Oh, Tyburn, Father Tyburn, to whom Jack Ketches prays, thy Treasurer's life, thy Club's fair name, take thou in charge today. Let us get forward with the dirty work."

WHEN a lawyer, a civil servant, a doctor, a humorous artist, a club waiter (who had been a captain in the war), and a secretary take on the compounding of a felony they do the job handsomely and successfully.

They waited until dinner was in full swing and the billiard-room deserted. Then as Henry went forward to keep watch on the cellar stairs, the others carefully lifted the body of the deceased Orientalist and bore it solemnly below.

"Not a drum was heard," whispered the Treasurer, "not a——"

But The Doctor growled "Shut up. If any one sees us we shall all be hanged."

"Sure," murmured the Civil Servant cheerfully.

Henry, so that he might be fully involved, was ordered to pry up the

manhole cover, and the body was slipped through. It splashed into the darkness. Then they put back the iron cover, heaped empty winecases above it, and went up to dinner.

Suddenly the Civil Servant, who had been sitting opposite to the Treasurer, gave a start and, bending forward, stared keenly at him.

"John," said he in a smooth voice, assumed to cover up emotion, "you have lost a button off your coat."

The Treasurer seized the lapel of his coat and pulled it round toward the light. To the cloth near the top a few strands of brown silk adhered but the button which they had secured was gone.

The five silently looked at one another and their faces took on a shade of paleness.

"Hurry up with that port," at last murmured the Doctor. "It is always the little tiny slip which brings murderers, and their accomplices, to the gallows."

TWO DAYS later, in the afternoon, a Sergeant of Police entered the Tyburn Club. He asked if Mr. —— (the Orientalist) were a member.

"Yes," replied the porter, "but he is not in the Club at present."

"I did not expect to find him," observed the Sergeant rather grimly. "Can I see your Secretary or some official?"

Just then the Treasurer, who had spent most of the past two days on the Club premises—on watch, may be—came out of the billiard-room. He introduced himself to the Sergeant and suggested that they should go up and see the Secretary together.

"I regret to report," said the Sergeant, opening his notebook, "that the body of a member of this Club was identified by letters on his person. The doctor who conducted an examination thinks that his death was accelerated by violence. I want to try and trace his movements."

The Treasurer and the Secretary offered their assistance and, calling for the porter and his book, proved that the Orientalist had not been in the Club for two days.

"What about the day before?" inquired the Sergeant. "The doctor thinks that he has been dead more than two days."

The porter said that the Orientalist had been in and out of the Club many times the day before.

Neither the Treasurer nor the Secretary asked the police officer any questions. It is only very foolish criminals who ask questions. Nasty, dangerous things, questions.

AT LAST, getting no further information, the Sergeant volunteered a scrap of his own. "We have a slight clue," he observed. "A brown coat-button was found in the hand of the deceased. It was tightly clenched as if at the moment of death."

"Not much of a clue, I fear," observed the Treasurer politely. "In these days of mass production, coat-buttons must be turned out in millions, exactly alike."

The Sergeant agreed. Then he stiffened, with his eyes on the Treasurer's coat which was the same as that worn on the afternoon of the painful encounter with the Orientalist.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, and taking the Treasurer's coat by the lapel carefully examined the cloth on the right-hand side.

A button had recently been wrenched off! Then he drew from his pocket the button found upon the Orientalist and compared it with the Treasurer's remaining buttons.

"It is exactly a fellow to your buttons, sir," said he. "How did you come to lose yours?"

"Oh, it just came off as buttons

will," replied the Treasurer easily. "I put it in my pocket intending to sew it on myself as I always do. I can't trust to women's sewing. Here it is." And the Treasurer laid on the table beside the Sergeant's button a companion, the exact spit of it.

"THAT WAS lucky," commented the Secretary after the baffled Sergeant had gone away.

"Not at all," replied the Treasurer. "It was guile and craft. I could have got a new button and sewn it on, but I felt that the plan which I decided to adopt more worthy of me and of our Club. So I matched my coat-buttons in a shop in Holborn and put one of them in my pocket to await developments. Now if you will dig me up some strong brown silk and a needle, I will honor this little friend in need with a permanent place on my coat."

Vault of the Restless Dead

A mystery, so amazing that it would be incredible were it not supported by authenticated reports of many people worthy of credence, is that of a burial vault in Christ church, Barbados. This was a tomb, hewn in the solid rock, a hundred feet above sealevel, and sealed with a stone which to be moved required the efforts of seven men.

In 1807, 1809, and July, 1812, three coffins were placed in the vault. In August of this last year, when the vault was opened to receive the body of the Honorable Thomas Chase, the three coffins were found to have been moved, a child's having been flung to the opposite side. Three more bodies were entombed, two in 1816 and the last in 1819. Each time the vault was opened the coffins were overturned and upset.

They were as regularly set in order each time before the masons sealed the vault, and on the last burial a sketch was made giving the position of the coffins. Strange stories were afoot not only among the negroes, who would not go near the place, but also among the educated whites, and the Governor with several friends determined to open the vault. This was done and the coffins were found as usual toppled here and there.

They were arranged, the floor coverred with white sand, and the entrance stone sealed with cement, into which the governor and several other witnesses pressed their seal rings. The ghost was not laid, however, and once more the vault was opened in the presence of the Governor and nearly the whole population. The seals were untouched.

Great difficulty was experienced in removing the entrance stone, and it was discovered that leaning against it on end was a lead coffin of enormous weight. The other coffins were upset, the child's had been again flung with such violence that it was injured. The sand bore no marks of footprints. The walls were as solid as ever.

The Chase family which owned the vault had the coffins removed and buried elsewhere, after which the vault was abandoned to its mysterious desecrators.

Double Pinochle

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

A TWO PART STORY—PART I.

HERE is a mystery story that is unusual if only because its characters are of the sort that do not go through their paces like automatons, but come to life upon the printed page with a reality that is at once unexpected and startling. And in MR. TOM HILL, who makes no pretence whatever, and has none of the attributes of the superman, Charles Wesley Sanders has succeeded where many have failed. He has given us a crime detector with a real sense of humor. MR. TOM HILL is a man you will like to know.

CHAPTER I.

TOMMY'S TIP

I HAVE got to the time of life when I hate like sin to be pulled out of bed in the middle of the night, but I knew as soon as the ringing of my telephone woke me up that there was something doing. I am a sound sleeper, and I expect the phone had been jangling for some little time, notwithstanding that it is right alongside my bed. I pulled it over to me and answered the call.

Tommy Morton's voice came to me. Tommy is the only reporter on Royal Selden's newspaper, which is the only newspaper in our town.

I don't think Tommy Morton ever sleeps or eats. I have seen him on the streets at all hours of the day and the night. I don't believe he ever has a cigarette out of his mouth long enough at any one time to put food into it.

He is a slouchy, impudent, cynical—oh, I don't know what kind of a boy, but Royal Selden says he is a crackerjack newspaperman and one day will be playing in the big league. One thing about Tommy is that he don't drink. I had occasion once to take Bill Downs to the cooler when he was full of liquor. Tommy, as usual, showed up at the jail within a few minutes. He took one look at sick Bill.

"Drunk," he popped. "Good God! My motto: No liquor, but everything else."

Which is really more than he ought to say about himself, because I think he runs pretty clean as boys go nowadays.

I'm not knocking the boys of to-day. I expect they are as good as the boys of my own generation, only they don't cover up as we lads used to do.

"Snap out of the slumber, Mr. Tom Hill," Tommy says now. "There are doings—large ones. Old Joe Dicks has been murdered, and the sheriff has got a tip on it. He is coming over to our village in utter disregard of the traffic laws made and provided. Y' know, I want you to beat him to it, Mr. Tom Hill. I'll be at your house in my chariot in ten minutes."

I HUSTLED. I didn't hustle so much because I didn't want to keep Tommy waiting as I did because I wanted to beat the sheriff to the scene. I know politics of our village won't interest you none, but there is a human touch in this.

Fellow named Simpson run for sheriff last fall and was elected. Royal Selden, our editor, fought him tooth and nail. The paper at the county seat supported him. He was elected by the skin of his teeth. Result was that Royal's paper got no news that the sheriff had to peddle.

Royal takes it calm enough, but Tommy sees red, as they say. Every chance he gets he pokes one at the sheriff, and I'm telling you that Tommy can put them over the plate.

"That kid can get as close to libel and not libel a man as anybody I ever saw," Royal often said.

Tommy and the sheriff has a run-in one night. The sheriff was over in our village, just nosing around. He runs into Tommy in front of the pool-room. I was setting on the bench outfront.

I had greeted Simpson pleasant enough, as I try to greet everybody, but he had only give me a nasty look. He turns on Tommy and he is quite savage.

"Kid," he says, "the next time you lambaste me in your paper, I will take your hide off and hang it up to dry."

Tommy's cigarette is leaning from his lip and he has his cap pulled down over his eyes. He squints up at the sheriff from beneath the cap.

"I'll take especial pains to hand you one tomorrow, Simpson," he said. "Why don't you take my hide off right now?"

Simpson smiled and went on his way. I had thought he was a pretty good man in a hard kind of a way, but now he was a fourflusher. Tommy just stood looking after him, puffing slow at his cigarette.

So you see why Tommy had called me up and tipped me off promptly about the murder. He wasn't going to let the sheriff beat me to it.

WHILE I was getting into my duds, I thought about Joe Dicks. I didn't feel any particular sadness because he wouldn't be amongst us no more. He wouldn't be any great loss. Joe hadn't had a mean streak in him. He was all mean.

He was a boat builder down on the river, and the best that you could say for him was that he knew how to build a boat. He built 'em for the folks that come to the lake in summer: rowboats, canoes, fancy little craft that would take a city man's eye.

He got good prices for 'em, high as a hundred dollars for one dinky boat. What he done with his money nobody knew. The cashier at the First National once told me he never put any in the bank. Lord only knows he never spent any.

He had run his wife into an early grave through deprivin' her of everything a woman wants, and he had driven his son away from home, and—

Whoa!

I expect I said that word out loud, for a couple of what you might call ideas had come to me. What *had* old Joe done with his money. Had he been keeping it in the oven of the kitchen stove or under a plank in the floor, and had somebody found out about it.

I could easy picture him in my mind now as a miser, running his hoard through his fingers as the village clock was striking the midnight hour. Yes, Joe was that kind of a man. Well, I put a label on that and laid it away for future reference as a motive for the murder.

NEXT, how about Stanley Dicks? Have to tell you a bit about that boy.

I had seen him grow up from a baby to a lad of sixteen. Then he was gone from our village for four years. Come back in a sailor's uniform. I met him on the street. I noticed he had some red sewed on his arm and asked him about it.

"Cox'n," he said.

I didn't know what a cox'n was, and he explained to me very nicely, as he always done everything.

He told me how he had enlisted in the navy a few days after he had run away. He had to tell them folks that he was eighteen, but he had no trouble there, because, in spite of his father not feeding him good, he had growed into a big, strong boy. He had been some place on shore as an apprentice seaman, then on a ship as seaman, second, and seaman, as he told me.

"They gimme cox'n to get me to ship over," he said, with a smile.

I didn't quite get that, but I understood that smile. It was a kind of a sighy smile, if I make myself plain. It showed me that Stanley hadn't found life all skittles, beer being prohibited, and he was trying to get it over to me that they made him a cox'n so that he would re-enlist and serve another term. Also he said he had come home on a couple weeks' vacation.

I wondered at the time about his choosing to spend his vacation in our village. I didn't see any attraction there for him. I didn't suppose he had thought twice about his dad in his absence, and he had never had a girl, far as I knew.

There was more, even, than that. Somebody had told me that Stanley and his father had had an awful row two nights after Stanley had come home.

Now, who had told me? I held one of my number twelve shoes in my hand for a full minute trying to place my informant, but I couldn't do it. You see, I'm sixty-five now, and my brain isn't as good a warehouse as it used to be. Well, I told myself as I pulled on the shoe, it might come back to me.

I GOT to thinking of the scene of the murder. I like to have things shipshape in my head before I plunge into a thing like this.

As town marshal for the last twenty-five years, I have had some cases that attracted outside attention. I solved some mysteries. Course that was almost all pure luck, but maybe me having an orderly mind when it works at all helps some.

All right! This is the way the thing laid. You went down Main Street to River Street. You followed River Street till you come to Buckeye Street. Ours is an Ohio town, you know, and we have to have a Buckeye Street. You go down Buckeye Street and you can jump in the river if you are in the mood, for Buckeye Street commits suicide at the river's edge.

It is a street that ought to commit suicide all along its length. It has never been paved and it runs downhill.

In wet weather you can get down it, but coming up—not so good! There are a bunch of ramshackle houses on the side away from the railroad bridge that crosses the river, but none on the side toward the river.

Midway down is the fruit store of Aleksandros Torquatus. I can give you his name that straight because it is on a sign in front of the store. However, everybody calls him Aleck or Torky.

Now we will go right on down the hill from Torky's place. The houses stop mebbe a hundred feet from the river's edge. To the left there is a bluff. There are three houses on this. One is Joé Dick's, a fair-sized house, but falling down, for while Joe was

keen with tools he wouldn't waste his time on his own dwellin'. Next-door to Joe's is Torky's house, and next-door to that is Sam Wentworth's place. Torky's place and Wentworth's wasn't so bad. They was of fair size and kept up pretty good.

In Dicks' place lived Dicks, alone before Stanley had come home on his visit. In Torky's home lived Torky and his daughter. In Wentworth's lived Wentworth and *his* daughter.

I've told you about Dicks. Lemme give you Torky and Wentworth.

Torky was a lemon. I think he sold liquor to the longshoremen, the fishermen, and such more'n he sold 'em fruit. He was always in his doorway, and when a man lounges in his doorway through the day and half the night he ain't looking at the scenery or the moon. However, I had never got the goods on Torky.

Torky was a paunchy little man, stacking up mebbe five feet and a half. His skin was like greasy leather, and his hair was as black as my hat. His eyes were blacker'n that. They was the only pair of eyes I had ever seen that was solid black. The whites of them was yellow and they kind of stuck out, and Torky had a way of using them without turning his head, a tricky manner, I thought.

Wentworth was foreman of the section gang on the railroad. He wasn't of any especial account one way or the other—a little man, mild, good-natured, working hard for what he got and not taking any too good care of it when he got it.

WHICH brings me to the two girls. You see, I have lived all my sixty-five years in our village, and me and the rest of the old folks was youngsters together. The present youngsters and the middle-aged folks I have seen come up from babies. So I knew a considerable about these two girls.

I mean, I guess, that I knew Janet Wentworth well and that I knew Lena Torquatus as well as anybody knew her, which wasn't so much. Everybody called her Lena except her father. When he spoke her name, it sounded like Leneea. I never quite could get the hang of it.

Tommy Morton says to me one day about Lena:

"That girl is a lily and a flame."

After I had got a kind of an idea of what he meant, I had a notion that he was about right. I had seen her in a temper once or twice and she was a flame then all right. I had seen her standing in the door of her house, and—well, she was quiet, but if she was a lily she was a pretty dark one.

That girl was beautiful when she stood like that. Other times, especially when she was mad, she wasn't so good. In her doorway she would lean against the door jamb and look out at the muddy or dusty road, and far as other folks was concerned she might have been a million miles away.

Her eyes would be half closed, but they would shine through the slits. Her lips—and they were the reddest lips ever I see—would be parted a little. Her bosom would rise and fall slow. She wore what I believe they call in these days a boyish bob. Her hair was the blackest thing yet, and it lay on her head as smooth as if it was all in one solid piece.

Lena was dark all right, but she wasn't dark like her father. He made you think of grease. Lena made you think of something as smooth as grease, but something very clean.

Course you can't tell nowadays how the picture will look from the way the photographer poses you, but I don't think that Lena ever had to use any of this red paint that the girls are so free with. I don't mean she wouldn't have used it, if and as needed, but she didn't have to. Her cheeks al-

ways made me think of the roses on the small bush in back of my house. I forget the name of them.

WELL, Janet Wentworth was different. Describing her isn't so easy. First place Janet was a *good* girl. That affected her beauty, for she was beautiful, though she was so different from Lena.

I don't know if I make myself plain. What I mean is that Janet was no harum-scarum. She didn't have to be "stepping out" all the time, as the young folks call it now. She could spend a couple of hours by herself and not be ready to die.

You know, I get around to about all the houses in our village first and last, through the year, and I know all the youngsters. It beats the cars how easy they get "thrilled to death" in this rapid age. Gosh knows I have had some exciting times in my sixty-five years, but I don't know as I've ever been thrilled to death. And as for getting a kick out of anything, as these boys and girls say—well, I used to take a little nip of Bourbon liquor now and then before prohibition.

Why, I have been in houses in our village and would be talking to the missus or the old man. The young folks, if any of 'em was at home, would be prancing all over the place. Sitting down and being still seems to have gone out of fashion. There would be a step on the front stoop.

"Wonder who that is?" one of the girls would say, in a kind of a hushed, down-in-the-throat voice.

If it was a lad with a motor car, even an old Lizzie that'd be likely to go lame at any minute—heavenly days, how happy those girls would be.

Speed! Give 'er the gas! That seems to be the idea. Still it may be all right. I'm sixty-five. I expect I ought to keep my mouth shut.

At that I got to confess that I kind of like the way they dance this here Charleston. I seen Bertha Tate dance it one night by herself, and she certainly could step.

Janet Wentworth had kind of golden, reddish hair, if there is any such color. She was a little plumper than the girls like to be these days, but she had good health. One of the doctors was telling me the other day that you can overdo this dieting business.

Janet had gray eyes, big ones, and she ran Lena a good race for color, though the color in Janet's cheeks was kind of pink whereas Lena's was red. The blood of these here Greeks and Italians and such seems somehow to carry a deeper stain than the blood of other folks.

Janet was a friendly little soul, and I expect she would have made friends with Lena if Lena would have given her a chance; but Lena didn't make friends with anybody. She was a girl that kept her head high in the air.

I always figured that she would like some girl friends and men friends, too, but I suppose she had a notion that the young folks looked down on her. So she bore herself a little prouder than anybody else in town. I have seen that thing work out that way before.

I GUESS, in a kind of an awkward fashion, I have set the stage. Anyhow I have let my mind hop from one thing to another. I was in the midst of thinking of Lena and Janet when I heard Tommy Morton's horn tooting out in front.

I was dressed, and so I got my cane —I carry one these days—and went out to meet him. I didn't hurry. Hurry is bad for a man whose blood pressure is now nearer one seventy-five than it is to less.

"Hop in, old-timer," says Tommy. "We haven't got a minute to lose if

we are going to beat Simpson down there."

I heaved myself into the back seat because, with my two hundred and twenty pounds, I take a seat to myself whenever I can get it. I leaned over and waited for Tommy to spill whatever he had to spill.

"It's a good story," he said, from his newspaperman's point of view. "They say Dicks was stabbed to death. First time I ever heard of anybody being stabbed to death. What does a Greek usually kill a man with, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"You thinkin' Torky killed Dicks?" I asked.

"Gosh," Tommy said, "I ain't thinkin'. I'm just entertainin' ideas as they come up and knock on the front door. Dicks is dead, murdered. Somebody murdered him. I wouldn't put it past old Torky to kill a man if he had a reasonable motive. Two and two make four, don't they?"

"And two from two leaves nothing," I said. "You can use them twos in more ways than one."

"What kind of a fellow is this Stanley Dicks?" Tommy asked. "He left here before my time, though God knows I sometimes feel as if I had been hung up in this burg for at least a century."

"It ain't a bad burg as burgs go," I said. "Why, Stanley Dicks is as fine a boy as ever stepped in shoe leather."

"Wouldn't kill his own father?"

"Gosh, no!"

"I hear him and the old man had a row. You never can tell. Stanley ran away from home. I don't suppose he would have given Dicks a recommend."

"Prob'ly not, but he ain't a murderer."

"Any man *might* kill if you provoked him enough," Tommy said. "Keep that in the back of your mind. Another thing: Lena Torquatus had nothing to do with this."

I TOOK a long, slow breath. We had turned into River Street and Tommy was giving his attention to the Lizzie.

You know, when you have been an officer for as long as I have, you get to listening for notes in people's voices. I had caught a note in Tommy's. That note must have been struck deep down some place in Tommy's being. It had a kind of an organ sound, whereas Tommy's voice, as a rule, is kind of thin.

Gosh! Here was something sweet and strange, as the poet says. Tommy Morton, that flippant, defiant, insolent news-gatherer, was in love, and he was in love with the flaming lily. Them words was his own. I saw now why he had coined them.

Why, good gosh, I said to myself, this is awful. Tommy and Lena! Why, they wasn't no more mated than me and one of these slick girls you see in the movies would be. If Lena was a lily and a flame, Tommy Morton was a burnt-out engine. Too many cigarettes, too little sleep, too much coffee, too high-strung nerves. Besides I had noticed lately that Tommy was getting a little, hacking cough. I hadn't mentioned doctor to him. You couldn't tell Tommy anything.

I think speaking of Lena had filled Tommy's brain with so much that there was no room for anything else. Anyhow he was silent. We come to the head of Buckeye Street. It slipped down ahead of us into darkness except for the faint lights from the houses.

Torky's store, I saw by glancing on, was dark. That was unusual, but I expected he had closed up and gone down to the scene of the murder like everybody else.

I DID'NT have much time to think while Tommy let the Lizzie down the hill. There are no brakes on the car and Tommy controls her on hills by using the low or the reverse. I have expected she would run away some time, but she hasn't yet.

Anyhow we got to the bottom of the hill in fair order. We were in front of Torky's house when Tommy stopped the car.

Lena was standing in the doorway. She was looking out into the night, though of course it was so dark there was nothing for her to see.

She was standing very still, her hands clasped in front of her. Tommy hopped down and run up to her. I think she had been so busy with her own thoughts that she hadn't even heard the car arrive.

"Where's your father, Lena?" I heard Tommy ask.

She backed away at the sound of his voice, and I could see her pretty well, under the lamplight. She still held her hands together in front of her, and I could see that they were making a kind of a twisting motion.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Where's your father?" Tommy repeated.

You talk about a man lifting himself by his bootstraps. Well, Lena collected all the scattered pieces of herself, which was as hard a job.

"Why," she said, "he's over at Dicks'."

CHAPTER II

THE WATCHER

I TOOK my eyes from the girl and looked at Tommy. Tommy was as still for a minute as she had been. Then he took his cigarette from his mouth and flipped it away with his thumb and forefinger. He kept his eyes on it till it hit the ground.

I saw him blow out a fine stream of smoke before he turned back to the girl. As he did that, his thin body came up. He squared his shoulders and straightened his cap on his head. Then he went still again.

A good many things were running through my mind. What I had discovered about Tommy wasn't the least of them. I didn't think he had any show with this girl, and I had known all along that there were deep places in Tommy. If Lena had it in her to make him suffer, he would bury whatever he felt and suffer in silence. And his body was in no shape to stand any burning out inside of him.

"What's he doing over there, Lena?" he asked.

The girl laughed. It was a funny kind of a laugh. It made me think of thin, hard metal being struck by something as hard. There wasn't any fun in that laugh, and still it wasn't a bitter laugh. I believe it was a kind of a guarded laugh. If I was watching, Lena was watching, too, and she was waiting. She was very quiet, but I had an idea her brain was racing.

"Why," she said, "he's gone over there to see what happened to Mr. Dicks. There's quite a crowd as you can see. You just came past there."

"I saw the crowd," said Tommy. "I also saw that your father's store was closed."

"He has no clerk," she said.

"Did he close his store after Dicks was killed?" Tommy asked.

"Are you going to put all this in your paper, Mr. Morton?" she asked.

"*You* won't be in the paper at all, if I can help it," Tommy answered.

I BELIEVE she saw Tommy for the first time then, and I guess she didn't find much to look at. When Tommy had turned to throw away his cigarette, I had seen that his face was white. It wasn't just pale. There

was no more color in it than there is in a sheet of the paper his newspaper is printed on.

The girl didn't say anything to his last remark. She just stood looking at him. He took three—four sudden steps to her and he had her clasped hands in his before she could move. He put his face close up to hers and whispered for a minute.

"But," she said, all cool, "I don't know anything about it."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

Tommy wheeled around and came back to the car. That lad seemed to have taken on half a dozen years in those few minutes. There were lines in his face that I had never seen there before. His face wasn't so white now; it was kind of ashy.

"Let's get over to Dicks', Mr. Tom Hill," he said.

I eased myself down from the car, and we started back toward Dicks' house. Before we reached the people that was collected around the front door, we saw the headlight of a car as the car turned down the hill from River Street.

"There's the sheriff, I'll bet," Tommy said. "Let's have a look before he gets here."

We didn't have much of a look, but I won't forget the picture for quite a while.

At one side of the room there was a cot, a canvas thing like campers use. On the cot, covered with a sheet, was what was left of old Dicks.

In the middle of the room there was a table and before this table sat Stanley. He didn't have his uniform on. He was dressed in an old blue shirt and a pair of khaki pants. The sleeves of the shirt were rolled up and it was open at the throat.

I seen that Stanley had taken care of his body while he had been growing up in the navy. There was heavy muscles on his forearm and his neck had a strong look. It made me think of a smooth column.

AS WE came in, he looked up. I had expected to find a worried look in his eyes, but there was none. His face only had its usual clean, boyish look, and there was no trouble in his eyes.

"Come in, Mr. Tom Hill," he said. "I've been expecting you. This other man?"

"Is the reporter on the paper," I said. "He's all right."

"I suppose there will have to be some publicity," Stanley said. "It's quite all right." He looked straight at Tommy. "I ask you only one thing," he went on. "Keep Miss Wentworth out of this. I have taken her to her aunt's across the river."

So! That was the angle there, eh? It was the explanation of why Stanley had been spending his time in our village. Janet Wentworth was the attraction.

Well, you know, it's funny. Things will be happening right under your nose, and you will never tumble in calm times. Then comes a storm of passion, feeling, and it blows something away and many hidden things stand out. This storm had blowed away the curtain from in front of things that Stanley and Tommy had been hiding. Two love affairs had come to light.

"There were two girls down here, near the scene, practically on the scene," Tommy said. "I don't see any reason why they should be dragged into the story."

Those two youngsters stood looking at each other for a minute. They was altogether of opposite types. Stanley was a strong, hardy youngster, with scarcely any nerves. Tommy was all nerves and nerve. What he lacked in physical strength, he made up from nerve supply.

"I get you," Stanley said.

THAT was all for us, for the time being, for just then there was a stir at the door. I had heard the sheriff's car stop outside, and he come through the doorway with a deputy behind him.

His eyes went to the cot, to me, to Tommy, and then to Stanley. On Stanley they rested. Any man could have felt the hostility in the way the sheriff looked at Stanley.

I disliked Simpson at that minute. There was no reason in the world why he should suspicion Stanley, but he was suspicioning him. I could see that he was going to suspicion everybody before he got through.

"Who killed your father, boy?" he asked.

I had talked to Stanley quite a bit about the navy, and he had told me there was some hard-boiled fellows in it. He said he had had a number of fights on what he called the topside, and he hadn't lost *all* of them.

I could see now that being on his own had given him confidence in himself. He had been up against a hard game and had come through, so this sheriff didn't frighten him none at all.

"I don't like your tone," he said, very cool. "You're the sheriff, aren't you?"

"I am, and mebbe you will like my tone less before I get through with you."

Now, I had told Tommy Morton that he was scarcely giving Simpson a square deal the way he roasted him in his paper, but Tommy had only sneered at that.

"Why," he said, "I would have to write a book to tell how mean that guy is."

I sneered myself, now. That was all Simpson knew, to start in to browbeat people right off the reel. He had a fat chance to browbeat Stanley.

Stanley fished a loose cigarette from the pocket of his shirt, lit it, and inhaled once. While he done that, he never took his eyes from Simpson's face.

"How would you like to take a running jump in the river?" he asked.

Simpson was a bigger man than Stanley, but he wasn't so quick. He strode up to the boy and shoved his face close up to his. Stanley backed away. There was no fear in his face, though, only disgust.

Well, Simpson didn't have much of a mug to shove up into another man's. He was an unwashed kind of a guy and he didn't make a pet of his razor. There was a stubble of sandy beard on his face.

"You talk to me like that and I will jail you," he said.

Stanley took another whirl at his cigarette, and then he laughed.

"Fellow," he said, "you can't. I am a naval officer, not much of a naval officer, but one just the same. No civilian officer can touch me."

Stanley told me afterward that that wasn't so, but I'll be danged if I knew it at the time, and Simpson didn't know it. For a minute he stood staring at Stanley.

"You ain't in your uniform," said Simpson, kind of lame.

"I'm still in the navy, uniform or no uniform," Stanley said.

SIMPSON continued to stare at him. Watching, I could see that he was casting about in his mind to see how he could put one over.

All of a sudden he leaned to Stanley again. He pushed his head forward on his thick neck. He lifted the head a little, and there was the jaw sticking up in the air.

"I think you killed your father yourself," Simpson said.

Wham! Gosh, that was a quick, hard blow. Stanley's fist just flashed up from his hip and connected full with Simpson's sticking-out jaw. Simpson went down hard. Stanley

stepped back and stood with his hands clasped behind his back. He was very still, too. Funny how still these young folks could go sometimes.

Behind me I heard the deputy move. I turned around. The deputy, fellow by the name of Craig, big, middle-aged man who was a kind of a political hanger-on and to who, I expect, Simpson owed a good many dirty political debts, had his gun out and was leveling it at Stanley.

"Stick up your mitts," said Craig.

Stanley put his cigarette in his mouth and puffed till there was a cloud of smoke around him. There was a faint smile on his lips.

"Going to shoot me, are you?" he asked.

"You stick up your mitts!"

"If you shoot me, the captain of my ship will personally hang you higher'n a kite," Stanley said.

Stanley told me afterward that that wasn't true, either, and I kind of guessed it at the time. Craig actually seemed to swallow it. His eyes stuck out a little and his Adam's apple jumped in his throat. Stanley snickered. Craig lowered his gun.

"You're overcome by grief at your father bein' murdered, ain't you?" Craig asked.

"Why, no," Stanley said. "Why should I be? My father was almost a stranger to me."

"You didn't have no love for him?"

"None. Why lie?"

I think Craig thought he could confuse Stanley, and he was taken aback once more by Stanley's frankness. He put his gun back in its holster under his arm and he pulled at his ear and pouted out his lips.

While he was thinking what to say, Simpson, on the floor, stirred. His eyes come open and he looked around, all bewildered.

When he caught sight of Stanley, an oath come from him and he tried to jump up. But you don't get over a blow like that all in a minute, and he only got as far as his knees and knelt, swaying.

At last he put out a hand and pulled himself up by holding to the edge of the table. He, too, dragged out his gun.

"Damn you," he said, "I've a notion to bore you."

STANLEY only dropped his cigarette on the floor and put his heel on it. He wouldn't even answer Simpson. Tommy moved up to Simpson's elbow. Tommy was himself again, for the time being. His color had come back a little and his head was up and his eyes shining.

"Shoot him, Simpson," he jeered. "Stick a bullet into an unarmed man. Do it right here in the presence of Mr. Tom Hill, whose word is no more good in this community than a ton of gold. Go on, Simpson, shoot. I will never have a better chance to write a swell piece for any man's newspaper."

Simpson turned on him and Simpson boiled over. He boiled so hard that for a minute he couldn't speak. Then he busted out:

"Beat it, you young whelp. I don't want any news sneakers around here. Beat it, I tell you."

"Beat it?" Tommy scoffed. "Why, Simpson, you have just gone up against the navy and got nowhere. Do you mean to tell me that you are now going up against the great American Press? Man, man, you are beautiful, but, oh, so dumb!"

"You get out," Simpson snarled.

Simpson laid a hand on Tommy's arm. I guess he would have put him out at that. I decided it was about time that I stopped being a mere watcher. I stepped up to Simpson.

"Take it easy, Simpson," I said. "You are bucking too hard a game."

Simpson took a whirl at me then, but, pshaw, I don't scare none. Too

old, seen too much, been through too much, haven't far enough to travel to warrant my getting scared at anything.

"You keep out of this, Hill," Simpson snapped. "I am in charge here. You have nothing to say."

I had to laugh at that. Why, if I had wanted to I could have whistled up the town, and every man, woman, and child in it would have backed me up against Simpson. But what was the use of taking Simpson seriously?

Let him run wild! All I wanted was a chance to watch and to get in a little thinking, the best my brain would allow. I give him a little bow.

"Go on being in charge," I said. "Nobody's disputing you. Only take your hand off Tommy Morton's arm. He's a friend of mine."

"Which makes not a damn' bit of difference to me," Simpson declared. "Out he goes."

"He stays," said I.

ONE TIME the folks give me a surprise birthday party and the minister made a speech. He said Mr. Tom Hill was a man of fine dignity and poise. O' course that was all nonsense, but I thought it wouldn't do no harm to spring a little dignity on Simpson now. So I straightened out the kinks in me and come up over Simpson about six inches. I stood looking down at him.

I got a pretty fair bass voice and I can rumble it in my throat with fair effect. I give her a rumble now.

"Simpson," I said, "take your hand off Tommy Morton's arm. I give you one-half of one short minute."

You'd be surprised! He took his hand right off Tommy Morton's arm.

"You intend to obstruct an officer in the performance of his duty?" he asked.

"Any time you are ready to perform," says I, "hop into the ring. God only knows that I am not a man to rob myself of entertainment."

"You're fresh," he said.

"And also an officer of the law, duly elected again and again by the people. Any man can be elected once, Simpson. It takes a good man to keep on getting elected. You might think that over between now and next election."

"I'll get you to manage my next campaign," he sneered.

"I may lose my mind by then," I said, "but prob'ly not. No Hill has ever been crazy yet."

He let a wet kind of a "pluh" come out between his lips, and then he turned around to Stanley, and he was right where he had been when he started.

"I want to ask you a few questions," he said. "Your father had money, didn't he?"

"He did. Quite a little bit."

"Where did he keep it?"

"In a chest up in the attic."

"Has anybody been up there?"

"I have. I had been uptown. I came home and found my father on the floor dead. He had been stabbed to death. I ran up to Torky's store and told him to get word to the officers. I suppose he called you, didn't he?"

"He did. Is that money still in the chest in the attic?"

"It isn't. The chest was wide open and there was nothing in it when I went up there."

"Do you realize that I am an officer of the law?"

"Gosh, nobody can blame me for that. I didn't elect you."

"I'm going to ask you a question. You keep your hands off me. Did you take the money out of the chest?"

"Bonehead, why should I? I'm my father's heir. The money would come to me. I didn't have to steal it."

"Have you any money of your own?"

"Nope. You see, a gob doesn't make much, especially in his first four years. Since I've been a seaman I've only been getting fifty-four a month. I have to buy my clothes and such out of that. I never had any good clothes while I was home. I always get my stuff tailor made. Seem to have a weakness for good clothes."

"Been doing some running around, too."

"You bet! Ashore every chance I got. Life ashore for a sailor bold is expensive."

"You needed money, then?"

"Maybe."

"You're one of these here sheeks, ain't you?" Simpson asked. "You make quite a hit with the ladies, don't you?"

I THOUGHT Stanley would laugh that off. Of course he would make a hit with the girls. He told me once that there was a lot of girls that wouldn't have anything to do with a gob, but there was a whole lot more that would. He expected he had been able to find at least one in each port if he had wanted her.

But Stanley didn't laugh. I saw that his eyes were boring into Simpson's, as the phrase is. He was very still again. He was waiting.

"Fact is, you got a girl right in this neighborhood," said Simpson. "You got that Wentworth girl. I seen you and her in Bill Kent's car riding on the Kingston road several nights ago. You wasn't so very far apart on the back seat. And Kent is noted for never looking around. You——"

I had seen that Stanley was about to make one long jump in Simpson's direction. I put myself between him and Simpson, and I done it fairly spry. Stanley relaxed real quick.

"The rough stuff won't do you any good, son," I said. "Take it easy. Depend on the old head."

Behind me Simpson spoke. He was addressing Tommy Morton.

"Get this now," he said. "You got your notebook with you—and a pencil?"

"Lord deliver us," said Tommy, "am I the kind of newspaperman that takes notes—in a book, too? Goodnight, nurse. Hail and farewell, Vale!"

"Well, you get this straight," Simpson said. Then he raised his voice, and, though I wasn't looking at him, I knew he was swelling up like a poisoned pup. "Stanley Dicks," he said, "I arrest you for the murder of your father."

"Raspberry," said Stanley.

CHAPTER III

STILL WATCHING

"YOU'RE under arrest," Simpson snapped.

I walked up to Stanley and put my hand on his arm.

"I'll take charge of this boy," I said. "You have a perfect right to arrest him, but it is a boneheaded play."

"We've got a motive," Simpson said. "He has admitted that he needed money and that his father had a bunch hidden. That money is gone."

We were interrupted by the arrival of the coroner. He looked at Dicks.

"Been dead a couple of hours," he said. "You looking into things, Mr. Tom Hill?"

"Me and the sheriff," I said.

He give Simpson a look—and left.

"All right, Hill," Simpson said. "You can take charge of this boy. Now, who lives in these other houses?"

I told him.

"Go and round 'em all up," he ordered his deputy.

"You better come along," the deputy said, and I seen he had a yellow streak in him. I had a notion his

flesh was kind of crawling on account of what he had seen when the coroner was examining Dicks.

Simpson looked at me and he looked at Stanley. Then he went along with the deputy. I still had my hand on Stanley's arm in a friendly way, and I felt him give a little tug. I took the hand away.

"I'll be back here in a short time, Mr. Tom Hill," he said.

"I'm responsible for you," I told him.

He give me a quick, steady look, and then he went out the front door without waiting to put on a hat.

PRETTY soon Lena and Wentworth come into the room ahead of Simpson and Craig. Lena was about as she had been, though maybe a little color had gone out of her cheeks.

Wentworth was very nervous. He kept wiping his work-hardened hand across his mouth.

"We couldn't find the Wentworth girl or this here Greek," Simpson said. He turned on Lena. "Now, where's your father?" he asked.

"I told you three times that he came over here," she answered. "I haven't seen him since."

"Where's your daughter, Wentworth?" Simpson snarled.

"Why, Stanley said he took her over to her aunt's," Wentworth said.

"After the murder?"

"Yes."

"Hoom," said Simpson, and he was as satisfied as a cat that has licked up a pan of milk. "Where does this aunt live?"

Wentworth told him.

"You go over there and get that girl, Craig," Simpson ordered. "Bring her here. Move lively and——"

He stopped and his jaw went as slack as if the hinges had worked loose.

"Why, where has that fellow Dicks gone?" he asked.

"He just stepped out to take the air," I answered.

"You mean you let him go?"

"He said he had the United States government behind him," I said. "I ain't going up against Uncle Sam. We don't want another Battle of Lake Erie."

"Hill, you're double-crossing me," Simpson yelled.

"The pleasure seems to be all mine," I told him.

"Craig," he yelled again, "step on it! That fellow has gone over to where that girl is. Round both of them up. They are going to run away."

"When you see Stanley Dicks running away from anything, I will buy you a cord of wood," I said. "He will be back."

"Keep out of this," Simpson growled. "Go on, Craig. Take the car."

Craig went but he didn't move any too lively. I expect he was thinking about that punch on the jaw that Stanley had give his boss. However, we heard his car pull out in a few minutes.

SIMPSON turned to Wentworth.

"Wentworth," he said, "where was you to-night?"

"Down town," Wentworth answered.

"What time did you come home?"

"Soon after eleven."

"Which way did you come?"

"Why—why, the usual way. Down River Street and then down Buckeye Street."

"What time did you leave town?"

Wentworth began to dry wash his hands. He looked from Simpson to the floor and then from the floor to me. I nodded to him, but he didn't seem to take any encouragement from the nod. The man had something on his mind.

"Why," he answered Simpson, "it was about ten o'clock."

"Oh, ho," said Simpson, "and where was you between ten and eleven o'clock."

"Standing at the end of the railroad bridge."

"Lookin' at the river, mebbe."

"I was just standing there."

"You're sure you weren't down here in this house?"

Wentworth looked down at the floor. He run his finger around the collar of his soft shirt.

"I don't think I'll talk any more just now," he said. "I'm not arrested, am I?"

Simpson give him a long look, and then Simpson made a wiser play than I had thought was in him to make. He just kind of smiled as if he was thinking of something that what Wentworth had said had brought into his mind. I don't know if it was all calculated or not, but it got to Wentworth. He suddenly begun to sweat.

"Set over to one side," Simpson ordered. "I will take you up later on."

You see, he was going to allow Wentworth to stew by himself for a while. If Wentworth had had anything to do with the killing of Dicks, it was a good play. He was already nervous and he would go on getting more nervous.

WENTWORTH got up and, gosh, I thought for a minute his legs wasn't going to carry him across the room to the seat Simpson had pointed to. When he was settled, he suddenly leaned toward me.

"Mr. Tom Hill," he said, "I have had a good deal to worry about lately. I was thinking things out down there by the bridge."

"Money matters?" Simpson snapped, and I had to give him credit for putting another hot one over the pan.

"I——" Wentworth began.

"You made one of the best little resolutions you ever made in your life when you decided not to talk no more," I told Wentworth. "Stick along with it and see how much good it does you."

"Will you keep out of this, Hill?" Simpson yelled.

"Nope," I said, calm.

You see, I'm a pretty good judge of folks. Stanley hadn't killed Dicks. Wentworth hadn't killed him. I had known Wentworth all the time he had lived here and I had known Stanley from his baby days except for the time he had been in the navy. Neither of them would kill a man. You got to use judgment in these matters.

"You better," Simpson said.

"Don't shoot me, Simpson," I said.

Simpson give me a nasty look, and then he turned his attention to Lena. She hadn't sat down but was standing back against the wall. Gosh, she was pretty as she stood there.

I had always kind of felt that she had too much up-and-go to her, but now she was so still again—so kind of droopy—that she was sort of appealing.

However, she didn't wilt none before Simpson. I expect she had his measure. She looked at him steady with her great, dark eyes.

"And where was you when Dicks was foully murdered, my dear?" Simpson asked.

Raw play, that! The girl's good looks had got to Simpson. He had a notion that she was only the daughter of a Greek fruit seller and maybe she would play with him.

It beats the cars how old men and slushy men and all kinds of men that ain't got no charm of any kind will think that beauty will fall for them. Seems like they never get over that idea.

WELL, I had knowed that Lena had fire in her veins, but I didn't think it burned as hot as it did.

She come up as if she had had a bolt of electricity shot through her, and she went up to Simpson like she was a queen. She kind of made me think of a gypsy queen that was in our village once.

"What did you say?" she asked, and she was like one of these here woman villains in the old-time plays.

"Why, why——" said Simpson, stepping back a little to get away from the heat.

"You unclean, you unshaven, you smirking, chattering idiot," said Lena, and a great peace stole over me.

"Er—er——" said Simpson, way down in his throat.

"I am Miss Torquatus when you speak to me," Lena said. "Don't forget that again."

That explained a good deal about Lena to me. I seen she was as proud as all get-out. That was why she had no friends in our village.

She had an idea that everybody held her in about as much respect and esteem as Simpson did. So she sewed herself up in herself and let them all go by.

"Yes, yes," said Simpson. "Well, where was you to-night, Miss Torquatus?"

"You are trying to find out who killed Dicks, aren't you?" she asked.

"Of course!"

"Do you know how he was killed?"

"Stabbed to death."

I moved over so that I could get a look at Lena's face. She had something up her sleeve, that girl. She wasn't talking right off the reel. She was going over something that she had gone over in her mind before. I could feel that.

"Stabbed to death with what?"

"Why, a knife, I expect," Simpson said.

"What kind of a knife?"

"I dunno."

LENA laughed and weaved her head from one side to the other and shrugged her shoulders. I didn't think so much of Lena right in that minute. She made me think of one of these movie actresses that does the vamping stunt.

I had always held her to be a good girl, but she didn't look like no good girl to me now. I expect she felt my eyes on her, and she lifted her head in my direction and give me a look. That look didn't score anything for her, either. It was defiant and mean.

I glanced across at Tommy Morton as Lena's eyes went back to Simpson's face. Tommy's own face was paper-white again. I expect he had seen a new Lena, too, and it wasn't a Lena that would appeal to a man like Tommy. He was too hard, too cynical, too defiant himself. What he would need would be a nice, sweet girl. He wouldn't meet my eyes, but I seen a shiver run through him.

"No, you don't know what kind of a knife it was," said Lena, and she was at her weaving again. "Well, I'll tell you. It was a stiletto."

"But, ma'am," I put in, "you are a Greek. You ain't no Eyetalian."

"My father had a stiletto nevertheless," she said.

"Your father?" I said, edging in. "Lena, did your father kill Dicks?"

"Would I be here, talking like this if he had?" she asked me. "Certainly not! Well, you men have looked over the situation here. You have had a doctor, the coroner. Yet not one of you stopped to wonder what kind of a knife Dicks was killed with. Stupid, it seems to me."

"Do you know who killed Dicks, Lena?" I asked.

She pursed up her lips and held her head up, very steady.

"Perhaps I do," she said.

It wasn't a teasing answer, for Lena wasn't in any teasing mood.

Fact is, I don't know just what her mood was.

"Who was it?" I asked in a low voice.

All of a sudden she clenched her hands tight at her sides, and her face went as white as Tommy Morton's was.

"Mr. Tom Hill," she said, "may I see you alone for a few minutes?"

"You can," I told her.

"Come over to my house, then," she said.

She started for the door and I started after her. Simpson run in between us.

"Just a minute," he said, "I am in charge here. If you have anything to tell, girl, you tell it to me."

Lena turned around and give him a look that ought to have set him to blazing right merry. He stepped back and I followed Lena through the door and over to her house.

I WAS expecting some big news of course, and I was feeling kind of grave as I closed the door behind me. Course somebody had killed Dicks. If we could find out who done it, that person would have to pay the penalty. That is the law, but when you come to my age you don't get no especial kick out of rounding up a murderer. It is sad business at best, no matter who the guilty party is.

I was expecting Lena to turn and face me and blurt out the name of the murderer. So I wasn't prepared none at all for what she did do.

There was a chair in front of a table in the middle of the room, and she kind of swayed up to that chair. I thought maybe she was going to faint, though she ain't the fainting kind, but as I put out a hand to catch her if she did go down, she dropped into the chair, threw her arms in front of her across the table and dropped her face on them. Then she begun to cry.

Gosh, that was an awful minute for me. I have seen lots of girls cry in my time, most of them on account of little things, a few on account of big; but I have never seen a girl cry as Lena did that night.

It was hard for Lena to cry. Her pride was against it, for one thing, and I expect she had a hard streak in her that was forbidding the tears to come all the time they insisted on coming. Her whole body shook.

She had on a white waist, a smooth one, silk, I think, and it was drawed tight over her shoulders by her having shoved her arms out on the table. I could see the flesh on her shoulders twitch and roll under that smooth cloth.

I didn't know what to do. When they cry, sometimes you can laugh the tears away, sometimes you can coax them away; but I knew that I couldn't neither laugh at Lena nor coax her. She was away over beyond me, and I just had to let her cry.

She got over it at the end of a minute. She lifted her head and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief she had held in her hand. Then she come up straight and looked at the wall beyond her for a while. Then she come round in the chair and faced me.

There was some streaks on her cheeks, but no tears in her eyes. Her eyes had gone dry. They was too bright, and I had a feeling that I wasn't seeing very far into them and wasn't going to. I realized then that I hadn't just a Greek fruit seller's daughter to deal with. I had a grown woman—a woman that was like a delicate, intricate machine. I expect that I knowed she was a passionate woman, too.

"Mr. Tom Hill," she said, "my father owned the stilleto that killed Dicks. He gave it to the Wentworth girl."

I EXPECT I went as slack-jawed as Simpson had gone a while back. I was flabbergasted, for a fact. There was two flabbergasting things in Lena's statement. One was that Torky should give Janet anything, and the other was that Lena was practically accusing Janet of having killed Dicks.

"You better be careful what you say, Lena," I said, stern.

"That's it," she cried, in a sudden fury. "That's it exactly. The Wentworth girl is a little angel. Now, if somebody said old Torky's daughter killed Dicks, you wouldn't be surprised or shocked. You know you wouldn't. Anybody could say that I did anything and there would be nobody to rush to my defense. But the Wentworth girl——"

She broke off and laughed queer. If she had been another kind of a girl, I would have said that she was going to be hysterical. While she spoke, I had got myself together a little.

"Look here," I said. "How do you know that it was that stiletto that was used to kill Dicks?"

"When you come to question that girl will you promise not to tell her what I say?" Lena asked.

"Of course! That girl don't need to be tipped off."

"In love with her, Mr. Tom Hill?" she mocked me.

"Me!" I said. "Ah, my age? Don't be silly."

"Let it go," she said. "But when you see her, ask her who first found Dicks' body, and then hear her lie. Don't tip her off now, Mr. Tom Hill. Let her lie."

"She won't lie," I said stoutly. "I'm backin' her."

"Sure you are," she said in a kind of a screech. "Sure you are! The little doll!"

(*To be concluded*)

Petrified Cities

Cities there are, so we are told, where in the silent streets still stand the inhabitants transformed in the twinkling of an eye into nature-graven images of stone. The merchant in his store, the woman at the grinding wheel, the charioteer with the reins of his rearing steeds still in his rigid hands. They are in desolate regions of the world, in Central Asia, the deserts of Africa.

Our familiar old friend Sir Kenelm Digby relates an account of one in Africa, the city of Ras Sem in the streets of which are grouped the inhabitants turned into bluish stone, where one moment there was busy humming life, and the next a stony death. In the market were camels, oxen and horses, in the houses fowls, dogs, cats and even mice.

Arabs still tell of an encampment where in tents of stone slumber in petrified repose the unhappy members of a caravan.

Lucivee

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

A HOWL, like the wail of a soul in torment, sounded from the timber, sliding up the scale to a long, sustained, shivering ululation. A long half-minute it echoed among the trees from less to less; then it died abruptly at the far crash of a distant gunshot.

Old Man Archambault shivered in his heavy parka, his head twisted sidewise upon his shoulder, the long barrel of his rifle thrust outward in the cold gleaming of the moon.

"Someone's walking over my grave!" he muttered, *"on two legs!"*

Rigid, his lean head with its goatish tuft of chin-whiskers thrust forward like a pointer at gaze, a moment he stood, listening, peering backward into the dim gloom of the trees, black under the moonsheen, in a wide semicircle to right and left.

Behind him the trail northward from Fort McLeod ran like a ribbon of pale flame, halting at the clearing's edge. Behind the old trapper was the forest; before him, on the flat shoulder of a little hill, his cabin of chinked logs. He began to walk heavily now, forward along the slope, talking and muttering into his beard, but he did not again turn his head.

"Th' lucivee!" he said softly, as if there had been ears to hear. For it was a *lobo*—a lone wolf, probably, he told himself, but—was it a *lobo?*

FROM his French-Canadian father and his Scotish mother Old Man Archambault had come by a legacy of superstition that peopled the forest for him with shapes of fear, real indeed when at gray dusk of evening the winds beat upon his cabin. *Loup-cervier; loup-garou; carcajou*—to the old trapper these were something more than names to conjure with.

They were real, or perhaps he preferred to think that they were, but as he went upward now he was thinking of his discovery of that afternoon: a discovery at which the short hairs at the back of his neck had prickled as at the touch of an icy finger.

Even now, he was feeling again the swift anger, merged with a superstitious fear, with which he had beheld his empty traps, stripped bare of their treasure-trove of muskrat and mink, marten and beaver.

As he had made his rounds—a thirty-mile mush through treacherous muskeg and over blowdown and quaking bog, he had heard, down-wind once or twice, the lone wolf-howl, before him and behind. But in a lifetime of trapping and prospecting he had seen few wolves, lobos mostly, dangerous only in books. And the old trapper knew well enough that a deer's fear of a wolf, say, is equaled only by a wolf's fear of man. A wolf, that is, that walks on four legs. On two—that was a different matter.

The long, wavering call had receded as he had advanced; he had found his traps stripped bare; but there had been no wolf or the trace of a wolf, no slightest evidence of fang and claw.

Some Johnny Sneakum, doubtless. That was it, a fur-pirate who might even at the moment have been watching him, himself unseen, from the

shelter of a near-by windfall, long rifle leveled at his heart.

And it was then, venting his rage and disappointment in one single, explosive word, that he had heard it: the rustling, like the patter of dead leaves in a wind invisible; seen, for a heart-beat, the drifting Shadow.

Whirling, he had fired from the hip, but there had answered him only the harsh scream of a whisky-jack, with the echoes of the gun-shot rolling upward to the low-hung curtain of the sky.

And as he had returned to his shack upon the mountain he had had a feeling that something or someone had been following him. Again the short hairs at the back of his neck had prickled as with a brief, sudden chill as he had held steadily onward along the trail.

Twice, pivoting in his tracks, he had whirled to face—the silence and the emptiness of the long, lonely way; and twice, as he had gone forward, he had been aware of that dim, flowing movement to right and left: a ripple, a movement, the shadow of a sound, like the flicker of a wind-blown leaf.

NOW, as he toiled upward to his cabin, he was thinking of Tevis, over the hogback. Tevis was not a trapper. He was supposed to be a land-looker for a lumber company. In the few times that Archambault had talked with him he had not liked the man.

The thing was instinctive rather than rational, but it had been more than this: it was the fellow's eyes; they chilled the old trapper, deep-down, for they were like bits of Arctic ice, with strange, pale fires in their depths, shifting and glowing even as you watched.

And Tevis, with his pointed black beard and high cheek-bones with their scars and scabs of frost-bite—what was it that he looked like? Why like a wolf!

That was it. For he had a wolfish look, Archambault thought, an effect further heightened by the black, discolored nails, long, like the talons of a wolf. And he had a trick of opening and closing his long, spatulate fingers, slow, as if in answer to the thought behind his eyes, and these milky-pale, as a wolf's are pale, cold and without ruth.

ARCHAMBAULT kicked inward the cabin door to a dust-gray welcome of abysmal cold. His fire was out; the place stank of cold bacon grease and stale coffee; but presently, when he had got the fire going and the flap-jacks hissing on the sheet-iron stove, he recalled abruptly another odor which had leaped out at him as he had kicked in the door.

It had been a strong, musky smell; the same sort of a smell, he remembered, that he had encountered when cleaning out a wolf's den the previous Summer over beyond the Nass River country. But it had vanished almost as he had opened the door, as if—as if the Thing that made it had vanished with it, upon the instant.

The old man in his day had been something of a wolver, too, what time he was not busy with his trap-lines and his deadfalls, but that had been some little time in the past, before Tevis's coming.

Under his bunk even now there was a huge wolf-trap, rusty from disuse but still serviceable. It would hold a grizzly if need were; but the majority of wolvers would have scorned it as medieval.

A wolf that could scent strychnine through double thicknesses of burlap would scarely be expected to walk into it, and the scent of a man's hand on it, say, would cause even a young lobo to back off, stiff-legged, from it at the first approach.

BUT old man Archambault was not thinking of the trap. His meagre supper over, he turned now to the consideration of another matter, and a weighty one.

Crossing the puncheon floor, he knelt for a moment, facing the log wall at the rear; then, with a quick, bird-like movement, he had lifted from its hiding place behind the stove a small doeskin pouch.

His treasure had been cleverly concealed; a false board had done it, and there was scarce space enough between stove and wall for one to have discovered that single, hollow log.

Old Man Archambault was not precisely a miser, but he put little trust in banks. He weighed out the money into one hard, calloused palm now without counting it; it totaled perhaps a thousand in bills and coin. A fair stake, and that was all. If his trapping made him any sort of return at all for the season he would be able to add considerably to that thousand.

If! And at the thought his heavy brows drew together in a quick frown of remembrance, of stark worry.

Slowly, as a man will when his mind is leagues distant, he returned the money to the bag, pulling the draw-string together with fingers that trembled.

The wind, rising with an eerie note, drove against the log wall of the cabin with a sudden "whoosh!" A dog-fox barked in the timber; the melancholy "whoo-whoo" of a horned owl answered him; and then, faint and far and somehow menacing, the lone howl of a lobo answered from the hills.

The trapper stiffened where he knelt. If he had turned his head. But he did not. For if he had turned his head he would have seen the face at the window, nose pressed to a flattened smudge against the pane, eyes cold as the sun-dogs over Arctic ice.

Head-high, at the height of a tall man, the face looked in at Old Man Archambault, and it was the face, indeed, of a lucivee (the popular name for loup-cervier), a lobo, a wolf; but a wolf that walked on two legs.

BEN TEVIS sat in the doorway of his hut on Scar-Face, a brooding look in his pale eyes, lip lifting from his black and broken teeth. Thewed like a Kadiak bear, he was a gross bulk of man, wrists and forearms covered with hair that was like a mat, furry, as an animal is furry.

He had not been long in the Canadian fastness. Men knew him as a timber-cruiser for the Babine Development and Timber Company, with headquarters at Hazelton, British Columbia.

He had so given out, but as a matter of fact, Tevis, secure as he felt himself to be, had stayed this long, longer than he had intended, for a reason and the reason was that doeskin pouch of Old Man Archambault's and what was hidden in it.

That Tevis was a fugitive from the States with a price upon his head was a fact known only to himself and a certain dark-faced man just then swinging northward, a hundred miles down-country, across the Skeena, with a warrant for the fugitive in his pocket.

But Tevis, although he felt himself secure, was yet anxious to be gone on that last leg of his long mush northward across the Finlay and to the Straits. After that he would be as safe as in a church but for the one thing needful and necessary.

The proceeds of his latest "touch," which with his heavy, short-handled mason's-hammer he had broken out of the safe of the Los Angeles Title and Trust, had been dissipated upon

the bars and in the honkatonks of a dozen different cities northward from San Francisco. Now indeed he was at a loose end, unless——

He withdrew his hand now from his pocket, fingering the few dollars that remained to him: the price of a dozen drinks of contraband, and little more. He vented a short, mirthless laugh, opening and closing his huge, hairy fist.

That thousand of Old Man Archambault's, now. With that in his pocket he would be sitting pretty, he told himself. But gross, coarse-fibered as he was, he lacked the courage to do outright murder; besides, it would be anything but easy.

The old trapper took his rest like a veteran campaigner, broad awake upon the instant; and there was that dog of his. Well, he would be able to silence him with a bit of poisoned meat.

A moment he brooded in a white-lipped calm; then, from the timber at his back, there came the long howl of a wolf.

Tevis stiffened; then he got quickly to his feet, slapping one huge hand smartly against his thigh.

"It'll work as sure as Gawd made little apples! With what I know an' with what he thinks it'll work. It's *got* to work!"

The wolf howl had come closer. Tevis, his face alight with purpose, took down his rifle from the wall, moving with the stealth and caution of an Indian. He knew what he would be about, for in that past, before he had gone down the scale to the man that he had since become, he had been a wolver, and a good one. He knew wolves; none better; for, after all, were they not his four-footed brothers?

Five minutes passed. Tevis had disappeared. The cabin drowsed, empty, door swinging on its leather hinge, peaceful in the afternoon sun. Abruptly, from the timber at the rear, there came the quick spat of a Winchester. Another, followed by a strangled yelp.

Tevis had made his kill.

OLD man Archambault looked up from the trap that he was mending as a shadow bulked suddenly between him and the windy night without. Tevis had come in so silently that the old man had not heard him; he had forgotten to bar the door.

Now he looked upward with a sudden jerk as the giant stared downward at him without speech. There was something in the land-looker's attitude that vaguely disturbed the old trapper while it did not alarm him.

Still, he was wishing that he had his heavy Colt within arm's reach. It hung in plain sight on a nail beside the door; he would have to stand up to get it. Unconsciously his gaze strayed to that hollowed log, and the treasure within it. Then:

"Evenin', old-timer!" greeted Tevis.

Archambault nodded slowly. "Set, won't ye?" he proffered, his speech entirely stripped of its accustomed *habitant* idiom. "I'll have supper ready in a brace of shakes."

The giant grunted.

"I ain't hungry, old fella," he said surlily, his restless eyes roving to right and left, up and down. Then, at a faint howl from the timber, his hard mouth drew downward at the corners, lip lifting as a wolf snarls, without sound.

"Lucivee!" he commented. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Sho!" exclaimed Archambault. "Ye don't——"

He broke off short as his visitor turned upon him a lowering glance.

"Them woods is haunted, old-timer, an' you can lay to that!" he told him darkly. "Well, I've seen——"

He fell silent, fingering his pointed

beard. In the lamp-light he seemed more than ever wolfish, grim, the mouth unsmiling, the eyes, bright as a wolf's are bright, turned now with a fierce, questioning, avid staring upon the old man by the fire. There came a low, growling mutter from the shadows, as the dog, hackles rising, red-rimmed eyes turned upon the Presence in the doorway, arose, stiff-legged, to his feet.

The long, wild laughter of the winds fled past the low-hung eaves as Archambault, with a brief word to the hound, turned a gray face to the man lounging in the doorway:

"Ye've seen?" he asked haltingly. "Ye've seen—what?"

Tevis grinned, without mirth.

"Well, I ain't aimin' t' scare ye, old-timer," he answered. "But if ye want t' know, I seen—well, I was out last night t' get me a buck, see? An' th' moon was ridin', same as t'night. Well, I got in a shot t'other side th' hogback. Lost um, how's'ever, an' him goin' straight f'r th' State o' Washington."

He paused, eyes focused in a hypnotic staring upon Archambault.

"Th' moon was high," he continued, in a low, even voice. "Th' buck he musta made a dead set f'r th' clearin'. An' then he was gone like that!"

His great fingers cracked together like pistol-shots. Again the dog growled, as if he perceived something that the old man did not. Tevis went on, his voice, in the semi-darkness, purring like a cat's.

"An' th' next thing I seen, mister, high-humped he was like a gray ghost against th' moon, was a wolf! I loosed off from th' hip, snap-shootin'. An' then I seen his eyes, like live coals. I fired between 'em, dead center, mister, an' he wuz gone like smoke!"

THE QUAVERING call of a loon arose and died in a diminishing obligato; around and about the lonely cabin the forest seemed to close in like a wall visible and yet unseen; the wind, like a lost soul wailing, died off across the clearing with a speaking hush-h-h-h. Archambault spoke in a cracked, quavering falsetto:

"A—a were-wolf! They're dam' bad luck, mister! But I knowed it——" Of a sudden he was the *habitant*, his speech pattering, disjointed, broken, like a man who has been running:

"*Sacré nom! M'sieu, il est du loup!* It is the wolf—*loup-garou*—lucivee. Sacred name of a name, it is the lucivee!"

The face of Tevis seemed more than ever wolfish, just now sharpened to a point of greed and a sudden swift elation. His glance was sardonic as he turned abruptly on his heel.

"I'm pulling my freight, old-timer, in th' mornin'," he stated. "An' if I was you——"

He left the sentence unfinished. The place was haunted; it was accursed. That was what he had intended to convey and he had succeeded.

But there remained yet one thing more, and if that failed, then he, Ben Tevis, had failed with a vengeance. But either way he would win, he told himself. He could not fail. Superstition, with the old trapper, was instinctive; it was a part of the life he lived; it was as real to him as the daily visit to his traps.

TEVIS had seen the hiding place. If, in the first panic-terror of his escape, and there remained yet the coup that would make that certain, the old man forgot his treasure—well, that was easy!

Doubtless, after a little, he would return to find, however, an empty hole, a ravished strong-box. And by then Tevis would be well on his way

northward across the Finlay, northward to the Straits.

And if, on the other hand, Archambault should take that thousand with him, beyond his trap lines, onward into the wilderness; why, then, it would be even easier, save that a life would pay the forfeit.

A shot from behind, and the grim silence of the primeval wood would keep the secret. At the cabin it would have been dangerous. As it was, Tevis would not lack courage for the deed that would be done in darkness and silence, deep there in the heart of the ancient wood with none to witness save bird or beast.

He turned now on his heel with a smile, secret and grim.

"Well, so long, old-timer," he said. "A black night with the moon gone—ha? Dark as a pocket it'll be, or a wolf's throat—ha? Well, I give it to you straight: I'm goin' while th' goin's good!"

With the words he had disappeared into the darkness of the night. But once out of sight of the cabin and the lonely watcher in the doorway, he began to run.

FOR A WHILE, following the departure of his visitor, the old man sat shivering like a frightened horse. The leaven of his Scotch ancestry, plus the Gallic heritage of imagination, which peopled the Wild about him with shapes of fear, conspired now with the mystery and the silence of the night, and the tale of Tevis, to feed the maggot in his brain that bred now visions of *Carcajou*, of *Loup-Cervier*, of Were-Wolves upon two legs, as of things familiar.

Never very deep below the surface, this leaven of superstition and of blind unreason rose now, full-armed to maim, to slay. But somewhere, too, deep down, the stubborn Scotch canniness that was his birthright spoke now, if faintly, out of the nightmare of his fear.

Silver bullets he had none; brass buttons, none, even if he had gone so far as to credit them; neither spell nor incantation; but he would put it to the test. If that failed, then let come what might.

He sat motionless, pondering; his golden store forgotten as if it had never been. Then abruptly he bestirred himself. What was it, now, that he heard: the true test of the were-wolf? The human scream, betrayal of its double nature: half-man, half-beast—all demon. So ran the tale.

In a fury of eager haste, he went about his preparations, the hound whining in excited sympathy, while the moon waxed and waned. At length it was done.

A MOMENT his dim figure showed as a lesser blot against the darkness just outside the door. Then, at one stride he was across the threshold, slammed shut and barred the heavy door, and took down his heavy pistol from the wall.

The slow seconds passed now, like the beating of a heart. He could hear the muffled ticking of his watch; it rose and rose until it seemed to fill the bare shack with its thunder.

And then all at once he heard it, like the patter of dead leaves in a wind invisible, or the pad-pad of slinking feet, and then, loud, like a summons of doom, a knocking at the door.

The old man froze, rigid, in his chair. Old Man Archambault was not a coward, but this terror by night had laid its icy summons on his soul until now indeed he could neither think nor reason save as a beast reasons.

Gone now was that brief flash of insight and shrewd sense by which for a short moment he had acted.

The Terror was upon him, borrowing its tokens from the invisible air.

Archambault got stiffly to his feet, pistol in hand. His face gray with a sort of hideous strain, he lifted the heavy bar. The door fell open with a crash. The old trapper, fumbling and peering in the opening, saw merely emptiness, but he fancied for a moment that he could hear a movement, like the shadow of a sound; a panting, a snuffling, and then, upwind, a faint, penetrating odor; the same that he had perceived and then forgotten as he had come in that evening from his rounds.

But there was no one there.

Behind him the hound was strangely silent as he swung shut the door, dropping the bar into place with a muffled clang. Then, abruptly, there came a whining from the dog, a low, base mutter, rising to a snarl.

Turning at the sound, the old trapper glanced sidewise at the window. And there, framed in the black, glimmering oblong, long snout pressed against the pane, wide ruff at the throat, pointed ears, fangs bared to the lamp-light in a slavering grin he saw it. The vision of the Wolf!

UPON THE instant, the face had vanished; and then he heard it: the scream of agony—the test.

Summoning his courage, he picked up the jack-light from the table, flung wide the door; then, lantern in hand, the pistol in the other, he was outside.

After that first inhuman cry, there had fallen a thick silence, yet filled with whispers, as if the very dark itself were alive and moving with what he knew not.

Fluid, like an invisible wall, it met him in the doorway, and then, sharp in his face, the acrid, faint tang that he had first perceived back there in the cabin; the sharp scent of the Wolf.

Lantern held high, he rounded the corner of the shack, and then recoiled.

For there, before him, dark face contorted with a hell of effort, lay Tevis in the trap. Near him lay the wolf pelt where it had fallen.

Face of a trapped animal, eyes in a dumb staring upon Archambault, lip lifting from his black and broken teeth, he seemed what he was; a beast snared in the fell clutch of his own devising. For he had overreached.

The seed of suggestion planted in the simple mind of the old trapper had borne fruit in the great trap planted beneath the window, its steel jaws holding the plotter now in a grip inexorable. The ghastly ambush through the green glooms of the trees; the tale of the Lucivee; the scent scattered upon the floor of the old trapper's cabin; the knocking at the door; and last, the wolf-pelt with its grinning head—it had availed him nothing.

THE DAWN was showing in a dim streak upon the East as a voice spoke from the shadows:

"Trapped, ha? Well, by Godfrey, Mister, he's led me a chase, but that's finished now, thanks to you!"

A tall figure, in a fur-lined parka, the five-pointed star of office showing in the lantern-light, strode forward now out of the shadows. He turned his dark face to the fallen man as Archambault, grunting with the effort, bent downward to release the trap.

The sheriff turned a cold gaze upon his prisoner, the handcuffs dangling from one mittened hand. The Wolf was in the toils.

The Devil's Bell

By WOLCOTT LE CLEAR BEARD

A BRIDGE had been partially burned. Therefore Jimmy Varnham, the Provincial Supervisor, had ridden far, racked with *dengué* though he was, in order to see about repairs.

A torrid Philippine sun blazed pitilessly down upon the sluggish little river, upon the road and upon thickets of twelve-foot *cogón* grass that bordered both; yet Jimmy was in no hurry to leave.

This was owing to the *dengué*, for that fever is painless when its victim is in repose, but resents any movement with what feels like an attempt to break every bone in his body. So he sat very still in his saddle, closed his eyes and rested.

Insects hummed drowsily, and a distant game-cock crowed. Then the cogón rustled as something forced its way through.

Jimmy opened his eyes to see a man, who might have been the creation of a nightmare, back out onto the low, bluff bank. His fattish body was streaked alternately with charcoal and white ashes. Black and white also—not gray—was his hair, which stood out like a tousled halo.

His face could not be seen because he stood on the river's far side, tugging at something that stuck in the strong grass. Presently he dragged it forth. It was the corpse of a woman, newly dead.

"Hi—drop it!" barked Jimmy.

The man started, but did not turn nor relinquish his hold upon the dead woman's wrists. Instead he gave a mighty heave. Instantly Jimmy's heavy pistol flashed from its holster and spoke; but lightning-quick though the movement was, it was also too late.

The corpse slumped limply into the stream, and even before it splashed that piebald thing had vanished into the thicket, leaving behind it a lock of hair, shorn by the bullet, to float downward like the moulted feather of some evil bird.

JIMMY'S big horse plunged and whirled when the pistol cracked. This brought him face to face with a girl who had approached from behind, mounted on a Filipino pony.

"I *hope* you're proud of yourself," she sneered.

"I'm not," growled Jimmy. "I missed him."

For a little she looked at him in stony silence. She was a tall young woman, whose classically regular features narrowly escaped great beauty, and sometimes did not escape it; but she was not at her best now.

Her mount was too small for her, her long divided skirt would have been unbecoming to anyone, and she did not ride well. In the helmet-shaped cloth cap that she wore, she suggested Pallas Athene badly adjusted to the local meridian.

Jimmy noted these facts with sullen resentment, but he said nothing. It was she who spoke.

"Do you realize," she demanded, "that you actually attempted murder?"

"Do you realize that the reptile I fired at was an *anitó*—witch-doctor—wizard?" he returned, with weary im-

patience. "And did you see what the beast was doing?"

"No—and I don't care!" she cried. "I want that poor man to know that there are some Americans who have a regard for common decency. Mr. Angsong will help me to find him, and——"

"Angsong?" interrupted Jimmy.

"Yes. Felipe Angsong, a great friend of mine. I'm looking for him now. Chatai—you know the little native girl who lives with us—has been taken ill, and Mr. Angsong is a *practicante.*"

Jimmy smiled at that last word with abysmal scorn. He did not hold this sort of native medical practitioner in high esteem. "Why don't you call in the *anitó?*" he asked.

It might have been the pony, and not the girl, who snorted as they cantered awkwardly away. Jimmy sighed and rode on in the opposite direction.

HE AND Lois Alden, the girl, were orphans. Both had been reared by the maiden sister of Lois's father, unrelated to Jimmy but who yet, in effect, was "Aunt Mary" to them both.

Later, owing to school, college and still more to his wandering life as a civil engineer, Jimmy saw little of the other two for several years.

Then, some months after he was appointed Supervisor of Pangasinán, Lois—with Aunt Mary, of course, in attendance—came to the Philippines as a school-teacher, and was assigned to a post in Jimmy's province though not in Lingayén, its capital, where he was required by law to reside.

Naturally Lois, no less than Aunt Mary, had been accepted by Jimmy as an essential part of his life without conscious thought throughout their adolescence. It was not until his presence at home had been in visits of lessening frequency and duration that she had begun to try him so. Her coming to the Philippines was a fair example of this foolishness.

There was no need for her to earn a living; it was simply those half-baked "uplift" notions of hers that had brought her. Just now he felt even less patience than usual with either her or them.

The barrio to which Lois was bound and on the edge of which she lived—a barrio is an outlying village within municipal limits—was inhabited by folk as primitive then as they had been when the Spaniards first came, centuries before.

It was among such people that the anitós', survivals of their ancient, devil-worshiping priests, still flourished. What this particular anitó had been doing was a thing about which Jimmy was almost afraid to think. That dead woman, of course, might be merely the result of a murder that the creature was trying to conceal, but he very much doubted it.

The sight, together with Lois's mention of illness in Aunt Mary's household, sickeningly recalled certain grisly rumors to his mind.

They must be investigated—those rumors—at once; it wouldn't do to take chances with them.

Stopping at the railway station to send a code telegram, Jimmy pushed on—at a hand-gallop, regardless of the pain it caused—to the house wherein Aunt Mary dwelt.

LIKE nearly all houses in Luzon, this one was built on stilts, and Jimmy tied his horse underneath it.

As he toiled up the steps, little Aunt Mary, as usual immaculate in starched calico, appeared in the open doorway. There was a smile of welcome on her wrinkled face, but a growing anxiety in the eyes that looked at him through her silver-rimmed spectacles.

"Why, Jimmy V a r n h a m!" she cried. "How does it happen that you are here today? And what in the

world's the matter with you? You look pale as a ghost!"

He told her. Taking him by the arm as though otherwise he might fall, she led him into her own room and seated him in a long chair, with his back to the light. She brought cool water, and bathed his burning face.

"I know that 'breakbone' fever," she remarked. "It has to run its course, but a little rest and quiet will sometimes help it on its way. Now you——"

She stopped and listened to some sound inaudible to Jimmy; then spoke hurriedly.

"Chatai has just waked up and I must go to her," she said. "I'll come back when I can."

"What ails Chatai?" asked Jimmy; but Aunt Mary was leaving the room, and apparently did not hear.

So Jimmy leaned gratefully back in his chair, reveling in the surcease from pain that came with absolute physical inaction. Also he smiled affectionately at the portion of the room upon which his eyes rested.

FORCED TO MOVE from one side of the world to the other, Aunt Mary had characteristically done her best to bring her old home with her.

There was her well-remembered dressing-table—or at least what appeared to be such, for frilly petticoats of chintz concealed the fact that its underpinning was of alien bamboo.

On this table, in their same old places, reposed her wooden-backed hair-brush and her comb. The two stoppered bottles that never, within Jimmy's knowledge, had contained even a smell, still stood like sentries that guarded the mirror.

In a corner made by table and wall the old double-barreled shotgun which had belonged to Aunt Mary's father leaned, awaiting the burglars that never came.

Specklessly clean, of a bygone pattern but none the less efficient for that—as the copper caps under its lowered hammers testified—this old fowling-piece, Jimmy reflected, was in many ways not unlike Aunt Mary herself. Somehow he found comfort in its presence; and because the pain had tired him more than he realized, he drifted off into a dreamless sleep from which he was aroused when Aunt Mary re-entered the room.

"Chatai was in pain, and I had to stay with her, but it's over now," she said, sinking into a chair.

Jimmy scowled as he saw how haggard and drawn her face had become. This had escaped his notice before.

"You've been nursing this Chatai kid until you're all in—worked to a standstill," said he. "This sort of thing won't do, Aunt Mary. You must get somebody in to——"

"Never mind me," interrupted Aunt Mary. "No," she insisted, seeing that he was about to demur. "Lois'll be home from school any minute, and it's her I want to talk about.

"She's more to me, Jimmy, than most daughters are to their mothers, I guess, and I love you next. But lately you've been drawin' apart. You've both been growin', but in different directions. Her notions make you mad. Mebbe you just won't bother to try, mebbe you're just manstupid and can't, but anyway you don't get a glimmer of the reason why she takes up with those notions.

"I wish, a million times more'n you'll ever understand, that it wa'n't so. But it is, and what I fear is that it can't be helped."

SHE PAUSED, and dabbed quickly at her eyes. All this was utterly unlike Aunt Mary as Jimmy knew her. Greatly distressed, he searched his mind for something to say, but before

he could find anything that suited him, she went on:

"Except for me, Jimmy, you're the only livin' being that can help Lois in the way that she's likely to need help. There's Chester Warren, of course, but——"

"Chester Warren!" cried Jimmy. "We used to call him 'Chestnut Worm' —remember, Aunt Mary? — because he was so plump and white and soft. But he wasn't a bad little worm in his mushy little way. Is Lois mashed on him? What's he doing now?"

"He's pastor of our church back home," replied Aunt Mary, a little nettled. "He's a fine, earnest young man, though mebbe not so very gay and dashin' and masterful. He cares for Lois—cares a lot! But he's far away, and anyway——"

Again she paused, gazing at something that she saw through the window; then spoke once more.

"That pestilence!" she breathed, and quoted, " 'The sickness that walketh by noonday'."

With quick alarm, Jimmy turned his head. Turned it painlessly, discovering, to his great surprise, that the fever had passed while he slept. He had not the slightest idea what he would see.

What he did see was simply Lois and Mr. Angsong, deeply engaged in conversation as they came strolling toward the house; and though never before had he beheld Mr. Angsong's countenance, not for an instant did he harbor any doubt of that gentleman's identity nor any illusions concerning him.

MR. ANGSONG'S plump form was clad in white drill. He sported rubber-rimmed spectacles which tried vainly to conceal the fact that his eyes slanted upward and outward.

Those eyes and also the name of "Angsong" were inherited from Chinese pirates who, in the seventeenth century, had taken and held for years a portion of the province. Men in whom that blood flowed were among the most intelligent and cunning that the Archipelago produced.

Aunt Mary's words, however, were still unexplained. Jimmy glanced at her questioningly.

"It was him!" she shuddered, nodding toward Mr. Angsong. "A walkin' pestilence is all I can think of whenever I see him. Jimmy, there's somethin' queer — onnat'ral — about that man. I can't tell just what—but it's there! See him now, gazin' into Lois's eyes like a snake with a bird. And remember that Lois's money would be a great fortune to him, while to marry an American girl——"

"That damned mongrel trying to marry Lois!" shouted Jimmy. "Does she know it?"

"She must. That's what frightens me," Aunt Mary replied. "He knows just how to talk to her, about upliftin' the human race, and all that. Then there's the way he looks at her——" She shuddered again, leaving her sentence unfinished.

"But I've got to see this Angsong," she continued, rising. "I'll soon be back; he won't stay."

AS SHE left, Jimmy went to the window and looked out. Lois and Mr. Angsong were passing directly below.

The latter took off his hat to run pudgy fingers through his hair—and Jimmy drew a long, whistling breath of astonishment. For under those raven locks he saw other locks that were white, and when these in turn were displaced they disclosed a livid weal — a weal that a pistol-bullet would make.

So quack and devil-doctor were one and the same! Jimmy never had suspected that—never had hoped for such luck.

Because those native wizards actively opposed all that Uncle Sam

stood for, they were forbidden by law. The case of Mr. Angsong therefore could be handled with neatness and dispatch—and would be.

Grimly satisfied, Jimmy was making ready to leave the room when Lois burst into it.

"Chatai's dead!" she cried. "She died when you were asleep—Aunt Mary wouldn't tell you."

"That was like Aunt Mary," he said, very gently.

"And that speech certainly was like you!" she sneered in return. "It was 'nice' of her not to bother you with trifles. For what does the death of a native child matter when compared to really important affairs, like getting that little silver buckle-tongue into exactly the right hole?"

He had stopped to refasten a boot-garter, and it was to this that she referred. He was particular about riding clothes, and she always resented the fact—called it "putting on airs." Why?

AT THAT moment the voice of Mr. Angsong could be heard in the outer room, speaking in the curiously clipped English of a half-educated native.

"It iss verree sad, Doña Maria," said he, evidently addressing Aunt Mary. "Still, a child iss careless. That Chatai eated unripe bananas iss no fault off you."

"He's Chatai's uncle, and he adored that little niece of his," said Lois, measuredly. "He knows well that Aunt Mary dislikes him; yet his one thought, as you heard, was to save her from self-reproach. And see him now—the unutterable pathos of it!"

Jimmy looked. Mr. Angsong was descending the steps, carrying in his arms a *petate*—a rush-woven sleeping-mat—in which was wrapped all that remained of poor little Chatai. Yet, adoring uncle though he might be, Mr. Angsong could hardly have carried the week's wash—or so it seemed to Jimmy—with more unconcern. But he managed not to say so.

"I wish he'd take off his hat," he remarked instead. "There's something underneath it that I'd like to have you see."

"You mean the mark of your bullet?" she returned, coldly defiant. "He showed me that. He wanted me to see how he loves these poor, ignorant people and what he's trying to do for them; to understand why he has to make himself one of them in order to lead them to the light in the only way that they can be led. His selfless devotion to others makes me proud—proud—to be chosen for his friend. He told me the whole story—"

"Sure of that?" snapped Jimmy, interrupting, his hold on his temper slipping fast. "Did he tell you why he dumped a dead woman into the river? I myself didn't know at the time, but I'm morally certain now. Did he tell you why he lied, and said that Chatai had died from eating green bananas? It was for the same reason."

" 'Lied!' " cried Lois, indignant but honestly puzzled. " 'Same reason!' What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean c h o l e r a!" he rasped. "Cholera — do you get that? Not enteric or typhoid, that we have always with us, but the real thing, that sneaks in from Asia, to kill the people of these islands like flies.

"This seaport barrio must be rotten with it, and the inhabitants of course are scared stiff by what they've heard —as every native has heard—of our sanitation methods. They're driven into panic by the very thought of 'em; charms and incantations are what they believe in. So they're doing their desperate best to hide the cholera, headed by your 'selfless' friend, who's trying to 'lead t h e m toward the light'."

Lois made no reply. For a moment she glared at him, her face set into

an obstinate mask of white rage; then she flounced from the room as Aunt Mary re-entered it.

"Quarrelin' again!" sighed the old lady, wearily seating herself. "When you was both little, you'd have told her what to do, and cuffed her ears, likely, if she didn't. And she'd have run after you," she added, with a reminiscent smile, "as fast as her long, thin legs would carry her, promisin' to be good. It was lots better so. This way is mighty distressin' —'specially right now, for I didn't get much sleep last night, and I'm tired, kind of."

"What you need is to roll into that bed of yours right now," said Jimmy, but Aunt Mary only shook her head.

"I'll set here and rest a little; then I'll be all right," she replied. "It's you who must be careful and not overdo, after havin' that fever, if you're goin' out."

Jimmy nodded, tramped out of the room, mounted and rode away. The grayness of Aunt Mary's face had frightened him, and what he wanted was to get the Provincial Physician over to have a look at her as quickly as he could get there.

Already he had sent a message, but now he wished it hadn't been in code; nobody could read it if the doctor happened to be out. He must remedy that.

LEAVING his horse at the constabulary barracks to be fed, Jimmy went again to the railway station, now deserted. The little telegraph office was resonant with the clicking of its archaic instruments, but when he rapped impatiently on the service ledge there was no response.

He stooped, peering through the open wicket. He saw an empty chair —the operator's chair—lying on its side; also a hat, nearly new, with a bright ribbon around it, evidently the pride of its owner's heart.

Sickened by the inference he drew, Jimmy tried the office door, to find it fastened. He drove his shoulder against it. The flimsy Chinese bolt yielded with such unexpected ease that he stumbled headlong into the office. Catching at the chair to keep from falling, he found that he was looking down into the open, glazed eyes of the operator, dead and already cold.

No doubt now about the cholera having come. No chance to send another message to Lingayén, the capital. And what about Aunt Mary?

WITH fear in his heart, Jimmy strode back through the rapidly-gathering dusk, and to his great relief found the old lady seated as he had left her.

"Where's Lois?" he asked.

"She ain't left her room since you went," was the reply. "I thought 'twas better to let her cry, if she wants to, before I went to her. But, Jimmy, be careful! These tantrums of hers are playin' right into Angsong's hands, and if——"

Boom!

Bell-like, yet deeper and less resonant than a bell, the sound seemed to force its defiant way into the room from that barrio, behind the jungle wall that loomed, black behind the rising moon, less than a hundred yards away. Aunt Mary glanced at it with a shudder.

"I hate those woods," said she. "They're like a great basket, filled with poisonous things that have human bodies. What we hear is their church bell. Not a real bell, of course, but not a real church, either—how could it be when that pestilence-man is its minister? I never saw the the place. Not many outsiders have——"

Boom!

"Chatai told us that single strokes

like that mean a funer'l," continued Aunt Mary. "It's ringin' now for the funer'l of the poor mite herself, most likely. Jimmy, there hasn't been a sound from Lois's room for ever so long. I wish you'd go and see that she's all right."

BOOM!

The sound came again as though to speed Jimmy on his errand. He knocked at the door, and when there was no answer, he opened it. He saw that the helmet-shaped cap and the divided skirt had been hurled violently into a corner, but no one was there. With a sinking heart he returned to Aunt Mary.

"Lois has gone!" she cried, as soon as she saw his face. "She stole out the back way to Chatai's funer'l, that this devil's bell is ringin' for. We must go fetch her back, Jimmy—now—right off!"

"Not you," answered Jimmy decidedly. "You're not fit to go—not fit to be left alone, either. If Lois sneaked off to that funeral, she must have known that she'd be protected there. Still, I'll make sure, of course. There's a constabulary trooper coming to bring my horse, and I'll send an order by him——"

"Send an order!" she stormed, with weak vehemence. "Waste time when Lois is there with that pestilence-man, and in just the mood to help him get her to do anything——"

Boom—boom!

"You hear that double stroke?" she cried, beginning to tremble. "That means a weddin'! The bell is ringin' for a funer'l and a weddin' both. Chatai's funer'l and—oh, Jimmy Jimmy! Are you goin' to stand by and see Lois — my baby — fooled into——"

Here she broke down, and with her thin old hands before her face, sobbed as though her heart would break. This was too much. Jimmy surrendered; to go at once seemed the wiser way.

"All right," he said, scribbling a few words on a sheet of foolscap. "I'm off."

Boom-boom!

"If I know that you two children are safe," sobbed Aunt Mary, "the Lord can take me an' welcome. I'll be ready!"

"Nonsense!" Jimmy called cheerily back as he ran down the steps; but it was an artificial cheeriness that evaporated before he reached the ground.

He stuck his sheet of foolscap where the constabulary trooper could not fail to see it, then struck across a dry paddy-field toward the end of a path that formed a gateway to the jungle.

BOOM—BOOM! Boom!

The three notes sounded just as the jungle gate loomed before him, narrow and black. Within it was not so dark as it appeared to be, enough moonlight filtered in through interlaced branches to render the path faintly visible. It twisted and turned, so that in no time at all Jimmy's sense of direction was utterly lost. Tired, angry with Lois, torn by anxiety concerning Aunt Mary and exceedingly cross, he plodded doggedly on.

Boom!

That single stroke gave the key to human voices — hundreds of them. There followed a long-drawn minor chord, so sweetly weird that it caused Jimmy's scalp to tighten prickingly. Thereupon he cursed the scalp for its weakness; then turned aside in order to follow a smaller path that led in the direction from which those voices came.

Boom — boom! Boom — boom! Boom—boom!

The strokes now beat time to a wordless chant, filled with innumer-

able grace-notes and unexpected wailing harmonies. To Jimmy's left a dull, red glow s h o n e h e r e and there through chinks in the jungle. He forced a way into the wall of vine-laced branches until he could peer beyond it.

ON THE CORNERS of an oblong mound in the middle of a clearing, inch-thick wicks of cocoa-nut blazed and smoked in clay dishes, filled with oil and set on posts. Between them, on a bier, lay Chatai, her hands crossed on her breast.

Their glare showed that the "devil's bell" was a huge, hollow log of resonant *callot*, hanging from a scaffold which also supported two smaller logs that were swung, battering-ram fashion, against its sides.

It showed the crowds of squatting spectators, in detail as to nearer ones, then less and less distinctly until all were merged into a common mass of intent humanity.

At first, however, Jimmy did not realize that he saw these things; his conscious attention was confined to a single object—Lois. She was squatting—squatting like a native!—not far from the head of Chatai's bier. But she wasn't singing with the others. This one redeeming fact was all that kept him from actually loathing her.

Boom—boom—boom—boom!

The cadence changed, as Jimmy now perceived, in obedience to the movements of a spark, intensely brilliant, that wove patterns in the dense shadow cast by the great log which served as a bell.

The arms and bodies of the spectators began to sway in unison with those movements. Jimmy noticed that Lois was swaying with the rest—and then discovered that he also was swaying. He stopped it with a jerk and swore viciously. Nobody heard him.

THE RHYTHM became slower. The spark of light moved through shorter and shorter arcs as he who held the little electric torch—for that is what it evidently was—gradually emerged from the shadow of that woooden bell. First the white streaks that seemed to gash his torso were revealed, then the horror of his ash-smeared face under its disheveled halo of black-and-white hair.

To and fro—to and fro! Jimmy's eyes, fascinated, followed that moving spark. What in blazes was Angsong trying to do—hypnotize the crowd? Probably. After all, the Philippines were nothing but rags torn from the skirts of Asia, and the Indian fakirs performed their seeming miracles by hypnotism—that had been proved!

To and fro—to and fro! Why did Lois rise so jerkily and step by jerks toward Chatai's bier? Because she could move only in time with that accursed cadence? Yes, by Jove!

But Chatai hadn't moved—she couldn't; she was dead. Jimmy did not see her bend her knees and—always in cadence—uncross her hands. And what could have put the insane notion into his head that the dead child intended to take Lois's hand and place it in that of Angsong?

To and fro—to and fro! Jimmy closed his eyes, mentally registering a vow not to open them again until he was good and ready to. He was James Varnham, civil engineer, who was boss of his own mind.

Eight times eight were sixty-four. Angsong wasn't going to slip that stuff over on him! There were twenty-seven cubic feet in a cubic yard.

It was a camera that had exposed the feats of those Indian fakirs, because a camera couldn't be hypnotized. That was a brilliant idea—and here was another. Let's see if an anito could hypnotize a Colt's six-shooter, by gum!

HE HAD to force his hand to grasp the pistol, but the feel of that cold, hard grip was more grateful by far than that of a woman's lips on his had ever been.

Tearing the matted growth apart, he stepped into the open space beyond it, took what for him was a deliberate aim—two seconds or even more—while he pressed the trigger.

Then—was he crazy? What followed was not the whip-like crack that he knew so well, but a deep-toned "bang," followed by another, which re-echoed brokenly from the jungle walls.

He saw two streaks of flame, like rusty lightning, flash diagonally upward toward the apex of the scaffold from which hung that wooden bell. He saw the great log drop from its fastenings; saw the anito stoop, too late, to dart from under, just as it fell, crushing him beneath its ponderous bulk as a beetle is crushed by a boot.

The chant stopped instantly, leaving a silence of breathless dismay behind it. Then across Jimmy's mind there flashed the notion that a bit of post-mortem hypnotism had somehow managed to run wild and fasten upon him, for he saw Aunt Mary hobble weakly into the circle of ruddy light.

But the notion vanished as quickly as it came; and during the moment that the hush continued Jimmy's mind was geared to abnormal speed, as one's mind in such moments so often is.

Thus it became plain to him that Aunt Mary had found the suspense of waiting unendurable, and taking the old shotgun, which still was gripped in both her hands, had forced her reluctant body forth to aid or avenge as occasion might require.

It was, of course, the heavy charges of BB shot which had cut the lashings of that bell and allowed it to fall. In all probability she had pointed her weapon in the general direction of Mr. Angsong, quite ignoring the detail of elevation, then shut both eyes and pulled both triggers, leaving the results to Providence; and Providence had justified her faith.

LIGHTNING-QUICK all this had flashed through Jimmy's brain when the hush ended.

Somewhere in the distance he heard an American voice bawl "*Sigeu pronto,*" which means "follow quickly." Then Aunt Mary sent forth a wavering cry.

"Lois!" she called.

Apparently still half dazed, Lois tried to respond. Jimmy sprang forward. Then the spell that held these people motionless and silent snapped like a broken rubber band.

Their sanctuary was invaded, their high-priest dead. Blind panic ensued. There was a yell of frantic terror, and a wild stampede. Caught near the end of the clearing, Jimmy was swept to the ground by a human torrent which rushed on and over him. Fear-driven bare feet in hordes pounded the breath from his body and stamped him down — down — down, far into darkness and oblivion.

How long this lasted he never knew, but it could not have been long before he realized that he was gasping painfully as he walked, much against his will, along those jungle paths. He discovered that his arm was resting across the Provincial Physician, who chattered excitedly as they went.

"The telegraph office didn't answer, so I beat it over here in a flivver," the young doctor was saying. "At the constabulary barracks they had just learned that you'd poked your silly nose into this barrio, so I commandeered a squad of our lit-

tle brown brothers and followed—and just about time—"

"Aunt Mary—how's she?" panted Jimmy; then recollected that he hadn't explained who Aunt Mary was. But the doctor apparently knew, and the flippancy faded from his voice as a smile might fade from his face.

"In the last stage of cholera as she was when she walked into that clearing, her getting there was simply a miracle," said he. "There's one similar instance on record, and both were cases of sheer will-power, I suppose; but they're none the less miracles for that. We're taking her back."

THEY had left the jungle now, and were recrossing the paddy-field. Before them, in the pale moonlight, went a litter—Chatai's bier of woven bamboo—borne by two constabulary troopers, while Lois walked stumblingly at its side, one of Aunt Mary's dead hands gripped tightly in hers; a picture of utter desolation that no words could convey.

The doctor gave an inarticulate little cluck of pity. Both men halted. Jimmy straightened, and withdrew his arm.

"Lois—she can't be left here," he said. "Stop at the house with that flivver, won't you?"

It was the best plan; there would be little danger, with precautions taken in time, and the doctor would have in any case to go back to Lingayén for men and medicines. So he nodded as he strode away.

Jimmy ran toward the house, past the two bearers who were leaving it, and on into Aunt Mary's bedroom, where they had set the litter down.

Lois knelt by its side, Aunt Mary's hand still in hers. Jimmy laid his own hand over both, and hers loosened to include his fingers in its grasp. She was dressed in white; her hair had escaped and was hanging loose. Her face was hidden in her arm.

Her assertiveness had fallen away like the outworn defensive husk that it was—that Aunt Mary had known it to be—leaving the girl herself—the girl he used to know, helplessly revealed.

Stooping, he slipped an arm around her waist and raised her to her feet. She clung to him, with sobs that seemed almost to rend her. Jimmy felt the sting of unaccustomed tears behind his own eyes, and fought against the weakness; yet bent back her head and kissed her.

SHE TORE HERSELF loose, her reddened eyes wide and her face aflame as she stared into his.

What she saw seemed to comfort her. Again she covered her eyes with her arm, as a little girl might do; and crying quietly, allowed herself to be led from the room. The honk of the flivver sounded without.

"Where am I going?" she asked.

"To my house," he answered. "I can't go—must 'stand by the ship,' of course. So you'll wait till I come."

"But I can't wait *there!*" she protested.

"You can," he returned, with decision, "and you will."

His salt-flavored *trope* was perfectly clear to her. She was a daughter of maritime New England, a race which wastes no words on its deep emotions; whose men go to the bottom of every sea, when duty requires, to the tune of shrieking wind, roaring guns or clanking pumps, and whose orders are obeyed.

So with joy as well as grief in her heart, she yielded to her racial heritage as generations of her mothers had done; and the flivver whirled her away.

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